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Department Press Briefing – June 6, 2022

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MR PRICE: Good afternoon.

QUESTION: Hello.

MR PRICE: Happy Monday. A few things at the top and then we will turn to your questions.

I'm sure you all have seen the reports of the Russian ministry of foreign affairs summoning your colleagues to, quote, "explain to them the consequences of their government's hostile line in the media sphere." Let's be clear: The Kremlin is engaged in a full assault on media freedom, access to information, and the truth.

I think everyone here in this room knows the censorship and difficulties your colleagues who work

in Russia have experienced, so I don't need to lay it out in exacting detail. Suffice it to say the Russians continue to make a false equivalency.

The Russian Government fundamentally and willfully disregards what it means to have a free press, as evidenced by them blocking or banning nearly every independent Russian outlet seeking to report inside their country.

Threatening professional journalists for simply trying to do their jobs and seeking to seal off Russia's population from any foreign information illustrates the flimsiness and the fragility of the Russian Government's narrative.

I also want to be clear about this: The United States continues to issue visas to qualified Russian journalists, and we have not revoked the Foreign Press Center credentials of any Russian journalists working in the United States.

As noted in the statement from the Secretary last month, the Treasury Department designated Russia-1, Channel One, and NTV, all of which are directly or indirectly state-owned and state-controlled media within Russia, and the revenues from which support President Putin's war. Many other both independent and state-linked entities remained unsanctioned.

The U.S. Government continues to engage with Russian media outlets because we believe it is vital for the people of Russia to have access to information. For example, our Ambassador to the Russian Federation John Sullivan, his interview with the TASS state news agency was just published this morning. We also support access to the internet and media by all people, including people in Russia, even as we stand in solidarity with the people of Ukraine.

Moscow's efforts to mislead the people of Russia and the world and to suppress the truth about what they are doing in Ukraine continues, including by making it illegal to use the word "war" in connection with Putin's full-scale invasion or war on Ukraine.

There is no other word except for censorship.

Next I'd like to briefly preview the upcoming 9th Summit of the Americas, which the United States is excited to host this week in Los Angeles, California. From June 6th through the 10th, under the theme "Building a Sustainable, Resilient, and Equitable Future," heads of state and government

officials from throughout the Western Hemisphere will come together to discuss and advance solutions to our most pressing challenges, such as areas – spanning areas such as health and resilience, climate change, democracy, digital transformation, and equitable economic recovery.

Hosting this event again 28 years after we hosted the inaugural summit in Miami in 1994 makes clear our deep and historical – historic commitment to the people of the Western Hemisphere and the commitment of the United States Government to implement President Biden’s values-driven global infrastructure initiative announced at the Carbis Bay G7 Summit in 2021.

In addition to the summit’s formal, leader-level proceedings, the United States is striving to make this 9th Summit of the Americas the most inclusive and accessible to date. Three stakeholder forums – for civil society, youth, and CEOs – will foster dialogue between national leaders and people, nongovernmental organizations, and businesses of the Americas. We will also engage in direct dialogues with these stakeholders on the margins of the summit, including with citizens from Venezuela, Cuba, and Nicaragua, as we work to realize a more equitable, democratic, and prosperous hemisphere. The United States is excited to invite and amplify diverse voices into the hemispheric dialogue, including the voices of the Los Angeles diasporic communities, during our time in a city with some of the deepest cultural, economic, and historic ties to the region.

And finally, before I turn to your questions, I just want to note the personnel transition in our office, in my office. On Friday, we had the task of saying goodbye to Principal Deputy Spokesperson Jalina Porter, a longtime colleague of mine, someone whose contributions across the department I greatly value and appreciate. And today we have the happy task of welcoming Vedant Patel. Many of you will know Vedant or at least know him by reputation. Vedant comes to us having been an assistant press secretary at the White House. We served together on the transition prior to that. Prior – previously, Vedant has also worked on the Hill as well. I know I’m confident all of you will enjoy working with Vedant, and we’ll be sure to arrange introductions as appropriate in the coming days.

So with that, happy to turn your questions.

QUESTION: Thanks, Ned, and welcome. Really briefly —

MR PRICE: Yes.

QUESTION: — on the Summit of the Americas, and in terms of the Secretary’s schedule there.

MR PRICE: Yes.

QUESTION: Is he going to be meeting some of these, I guess, civil society members from Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela?

MR PRICE: He has a full schedule. We released a statement this morning indicating some of the elements that he will take part in, in addition to the fact that he will be accompanying President Biden to many of his bilateral engagements and engagements with government leaders. The Secretary will indeed be taking part in engagements with civil society. Tomorrow evening, for example, he'll be taking part in an event predicated on media freedom. This falls within the bucket of democratic governance and civil society with the region. There will be other opportunities for him to meet not only with civil society stakeholders, but stakeholders from the private sector in addition to his engagement with government counterparts.

QUESTION: And then related to this, how disappointing is it or how much of a blow is it to the summit itself, to the administration's hemispheric diplomatic efforts, that the Mexican president is not going to be there? I mean, Mexico is arguably – well, not arguably, it is the only country that borders the U.S. directly other than Canada. So how disappointed are you that he won't be there? And what does that mean for the chances of success or failure of any kind of initiative coming out of – hemispheric initiative coming out?

MR PRICE: Well, as we've said, this is a summit that will bring together thousands of individuals, both government individuals and private citizens as well as representatives of the private sector, from across the hemisphere. Of course, Mexico is an important hemispheric player. We are very gratified that the Secretary's counterpart, Foreign Secretary Ebrard, will be in attendance. We will have a number of opportunities to engage with our Mexican counterparts in the context of the summit this week and we look forward to those engagements.

QUESTION: Right, but it's a summit, and Ebrard, as wonderful as he is as foreign secretary, I'm sure – at least I guess he is – is not the head of state. So isn't that a – is it a disappointment that you're not having your – that the leader of Mexico is not going to be there?

MR PRICE: We have certainly heard from President López Obrador today. We understand his position on this. As I said before, we look forward to engaging with Foreign Secretary Ebrard. The fact is that Mexico is an important partner across a range of issues. You mentioned one of them,

migration. There are a number of other issues, from COVID to a sustainable, equitable, inclusive economic recovery, to the climate crisis we're confronting, in addition to the issue of regional and hemispheric migration.

We will have an opportunity to meet with Foreign Secretary Ebrard and to speak with him in the context of the summit, but Mexico – we are gratified to have a relationship with Mexico that is broad and deep, meaning that we have had and we will continue to have a number of occasions to engage with our Mexican neighbors, not only at this summit but in future engagements in the days and weeks ahead.

Humeyra.

QUESTION: Ned, just to – not to beat a dead horse on that, but AMLO basically said, quote, "There can't be a Summit of...Americas if not all countries of the American continent are taking part." So what is your response to that?

MR PRICE: Well, as the host of the summit, we do have wide discretion in terms of invitations. We greatly value the diversity of opinions that we've heard from our neighbors in the hemisphere about participation in the summit, what that should look like, what that should not look like. In recent weeks, senior officials, including Secretary Blinken, have been in constant contact or near-constant contact, I should say, with our counterparts through the hemisphere – throughout the hemisphere. Secretary Blinken has spoken on a number of occasions to Foreign Secretary Ebrard to hear Mexico's perspective on this question. We have also heard the perspectives of other neighbors in the hemisphere.

We, again, recognize and respect the position of our allies in supporting – in support of inclusive dialogue. We also note, as I have, that non-governmental representatives will be in attendance from Cuba, from Venezuela, and from Nicaragua. Participants from those three countries have registered to take part in stakeholder events.

QUESTION: Just – I mean, where do you think this incident leaves U.S.-Mexico bilateral relations? Can you say that it's completely unscathed?

MR PRICE: We have a broad and deep relationship with Mexico. We will be able to explore and to delve into elements of that relationship with our Mexican neighbors this week in Los Angeles. We

will have engagements with our Mexican neighbors in the coming days and weeks beyond that. So certainly there are diversity of opinions when it comes to who should be invited to the Summit of the Americas. The United States, as I mentioned before, as the convener of this particular summit has broad discretion. We have done our best to incorporate the viewpoints of the hemisphere. When it comes to our Mexican partners, we look forward to engaging with the foreign secretary.

Francesco.

QUESTION: Yeah, media at the White House just confirmed today that those three countries weren't invited. Does that mean that until the end, possible, potential invitation of one of them or three of them was on the table? And what made the balance go on the side of not inviting them?

MR PRICE: Well, I can tell you that we were in discussions with our hemispheric neighbors until very recent hours. And, in fact, Secretary Blinken had an opportunity to speak most recently with Foreign Secretary Ebrard last night. We have been in regular contact with other neighbors throughout the hemisphere; we've been in contact with civil society stakeholders; we've been in regular contact with Congress as well.

When it comes to the participation and the issues that have been at the fore, I think it is unfortunately notable that one of the key elements of this summit is democratic governance. And these three countries are not exemplars, to put it mildly, of democratic governance. In recent days alone, the Cuban regime has tried two artists on charges that actually criminalize the freedom of speech and artistic expression in Cuba. Diplomats and the press were barred entry to their trials. We're anxiously awaiting the verdicts.

But again, these most recent – this most recent suppression of freedom of expression is a hallmark of what we have seen from this Cuban regime over the course of years, but especially since the protest of July 11th last year. Since those protests, this is a regime that has not countenanced peaceful opposition. Of course, we've seen these two ongoing trials. We're awaiting the verdict in these cases.

But these are not isolated incidents. We have seen this regime arrest, detain, hold without charge, hold incommunicado, individuals who were doing nothing but expressing the universal right that they have to assemble peacefully, to express their views, and views that did not happen to correspond with the views of the Cuban regime for that supposed offense. They have been

detained. They have been deprived of their liberty. They have been deprived of rights that should be universal.

The same, of course, could be said of what has happened in Nicaragua, where we've seen an increasingly constricted space for civil society, and of course, Venezuela under the Maduro regime, a regime that we don't recognize and we continue, of course, to recognize the leadership of interim President Juan Guaidó.

QUESTION: Do you mean that absent these most recent steps by Cuba, an invitation at some level could have been possible? Or were you sharing some more precise demands on something to do on democracy, et cetera?

MR PRICE: I'm not saying that. I am saying that the challenges that these three regimes pose to some of the central tenets of the Summit of the Americas that is to be held this week, those challenges were just insurmountable when you talk about bringing together a summit where democratic governance, democratic values, is on the agenda.

Now, of course we have worked closely, we have listened carefully, to other countries, to important stakeholders in the region. Many of our neighbors have voiced their opinions, their good faith opinions about what a Summit of the Americas should look like in terms of representation. We will continue to have an opportunity to discuss the issues that are at the heart of this summit with those partners, and we'll have an opportunity to discuss the issues that are at the heart of the summit with civil society representatives, including the civil society representatives that will be in attendance, or at least that have registered, from these three countries – Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua.

Said.

QUESTION: Thank you. A very quick question. Will Guaidó be represented? Will he attend? Will he be represented in the summit?

MR PRICE: We expect that representatives of the interim government of Juan Guidó will participate in the summit.

Yes.

QUESTION: Just one final point.

MR PRICE: Sure.

QUESTION: I mean, you certainly cannot wish these countries away. I mean, are you – you've had some sort of animosity with Cuba for 60 years and so on. You cannot just wish them away. Why not include them in these discussions? I mean, I asked you this on (inaudible) the other day. I mean, you don't want just the countries that you agree with. You want countries that you disagree with in the summit.

MR PRICE: Well, Said, our policy towards each of these countries – Nicaragua, Venezuela, and Cuba – is predicated on one thing, and that is furthering or advancing the democratic aspirations of the Cuban people, the Venezuelan people, and the Nicaraguan people. Of course we can't just wish the challenges, the profound challenges to democratic governance, away in any of these three countries. That is not what we have done. But as I said before, in recent weeks in at least one of these cases, in all three in one way or another, the challenge to democratic governance has only been underlined by the actions of these regimes.

When it comes to our approach to all three countries, we have taken steps, including steps in recent weeks with at least a couple of these countries, that at least in our estimation seek to advance the democratic aspirations, the aspirations of these three peoples to live in a more freer, more open society. We have taken concrete steps. We will continue to do what we can to advance the cause of liberty, to advance the cause of democracy, that these three peoples so desire.

Kylie.

QUESTION: Can we go to Russia unless —

MR PRICE: Anything else on the summit? Sure, I'll take two quick summit questions. Sure.

QUESTION: My question is foreign policy advisor – Foreign Policy advisor to the President of Azerbaijan Hikmet Hajiyev —

MR PRICE: We'll come to other regions in a moment. Anything else on the Summit of the Americas? All right. Let's go – sorry, Kylie. We'll – and then we'll come back.

QUESTION: Just back to your opener, then. I'm just wondering if you can explain to us if there will be any costs for Russia if they do, in fact, kick out these Western journalists that they are now threatening, and if the – if you guys at the State Department found out about these retaliatory steps that they are considering directly, or if you found out about them in the same way that the journalists did from the Kremlin?

MR PRICE: My understanding is that we found out the same way all of you did when your colleagues were summoned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and essentially read a riot act that was a litany of false equivalence.

Look, Russia has already suffered devastating reputational costs, and of course, any effort to further suppress or constrict the ability of independent journalists to operate freely inside Russia will incur further reputational costs for Moscow, as if those costs needed to be underlined any further.

But I think what we've seen is that regardless of the steps that Russia attempts to take, their efforts to fully suppress, to fully clamp down on truthful information is going to be – those efforts are going to be futile. And we have already seen that. We have seen even senior Russian Government officials express and air their grievances, their profound disagreements, with the policy choices of the Kremlin, most notably the choice that the Kremlin has taken to wage a brutal war against Ukraine, to air those disagreements publicly. In the earliest days of this war of choice, this unjustified war, we saw thousands, tens of thousands of individuals across dozens of Russian cities peacefully take to the streets. Many of them were detained, many of them were arrested, for doing nothing more than, again, exercising what should be the universal right to freedom of assembly.

And so the point is that even as Russia tries to put forward these false arguments, these lies to justify their – what is a clear and apparent effort to intimidate independent journalists, Russia will not be able to fully suppress the dissent even within their own system to this brutal war against Ukraine. There could be no means of doing that because we know that opposition to this conflict is so widespread even inside of Russia, where, unfortunately, the Russian people are fed a steady diet of lies and propaganda and disinformation. But even the Kremlin's efforts to clamp down on the organs of information and even their efforts to intimate reporters have failed, and information continues to make its way through what is undoubtedly a very constricted information environment.

QUESTION: And just a quick question. Do you know what prompted this? I mean, obviously we've

seen them increasingly clamp down on news outlets and good information, but was there a specific incident? Do you think it's the sanctions from May that you guys put on to three Russian-controlled news agencies? Do you have any idea?

MR PRICE: It's difficult to say and I wouldn't want to venture a guess. I believe the Russian Federation has publicly attributed it to the designations that we enacted against Russian-backed or Russian Government entities. These are entities that had been primary sources of foreign revenue for the Kremlin to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars, a key driver in terms of foreign funding for the Kremlin, or at least a significant source of foreign investment.

Of course, in justifying what is unjustifiable – because it is nothing more than an attempt to intimidate independent journalists – we have seen this false equivalence, putting on the same plane your colleagues, your colleagues whom you know to be independent-minded, impartial, doing what they can under a very difficult operating environment, to uncover and to report the truth, to what are propaganda arms of the Russian Government.

QUESTION: Sorry, Ned. How many senior Russian Government officials are you aware of who have voiced their opposition and disagreement to their policy?

MR PRICE: I believe I said that some senior Russian Government officials have.

QUESTION: Yeah. How many?

MR PRICE: We have seen certainly former —

QUESTION: One?

MR PRICE: Former Russian Government officials go —

QUESTION: That was one.

MR PRICE: — go on state TV even. We've seen a senior official in Geneva also —

QUESTION: Well, I mean senior official. He was like the number three or four guy. I'm not saying there aren't any. I'm just wondering – you seem to say that, like, there's some big groundswell of

opposition within —

MR PRICE: No, I pointed to you —

QUESTION: — senior government officials —

MR PRICE: — pointed to examples.

QUESTION: But okay. Well, a former official going on television, this guy who's the analyst who was widely pointed to, and then the one guy in Geneva?

MR PRICE: And Matt, I think what you have seen from thousands of people, tens of thousands of people take to the streets —

QUESTION: But I get —

MR PRICE: It is not confined to two people, of course.

QUESTION: Well, fine, but you said senior Russian Government officials. So I just want to make sure I understand who.

QUESTION: Right, right. Yes, Alex.

QUESTION: A follow-up before you shut this on how they treat their own reporters. We have the latest example of Andrei Soldatov. He is known for his coverage of Russian security service, a very well-known journalist. He got – basically, he learned that he is on the wanted list, and also his bank accounts got frozen this morning. How do you read that news? First of all, them being able to freeze a bank account of their own reporter and at the same time put him on a wanted list? Secondly, can I get a reaction to the mere fact that this is basically another example of their litany of, let's say, attacks over their own journalists?

MR PRICE: I'm not immediately familiar with the specific case your raised. If we have a specific comment, we'll offer it, but what you describe certainly sounds in the vein of what appears to be a concerted campaign on the part of the Kremlin to intimidate independent journalists. The Russian Government, the Kremlin has a long track record of pursuing those who have attempted to put a

spotlight on it, including its security services. And of course, history is unfortunately riddled with examples of independent journalists and truth-tellers whose reporting has been suppressed, or in some cases, much worse has befallen them. And there are even recent examples of what appears to be very clear examples of the Russian Government pursuing and subjecting even to intimidation and to violence those who would attempt to expose corruption, malfeasance, wrongdoing on the part of the Russian Government.

Anything – yes.

QUESTION: On Russia still.

MR PRICE: Yes.

QUESTION: So how does the U.S. view Russia's renewed bombing of Kyiv? Is this President Putin sending a message to the West about the arms that it's sending to Ukraine to now, or the return to a broader military objective than the Donbas? And does the renewed bombing campaign of Kyiv change operations at Embassy Kyiv at all?

MR PRICE: Well, there have been a number of examples of Russia's brutality where we have had to question whether there was any military objective undergirding it, or whether it was just an attempt to terrorize the population of Ukraine, including the civilian population of Ukraine, and targeting sites on the outskirts of Ukraine could clearly fall into that category.

The attacks that we've seen in recent days, however, of course, are not limited to the capital. The U.S. embassy in Kyiv noted that Russia's bombardment hit a historic Orthodox monument in Donetsk in eastern Ukraine, a sacred site in Ukraine that had served as a refuge, a place of refuge for fleeing civilians since the brutal war in Ukraine began. These attacks have been senseless, what appear to be senseless affronts to Ukraine's people, to Ukraine's government as well.

The ongoing violence continues to take the form of attacks that have injured or killed civilians, destroyed civilian infrastructure, and that follows previous strikes that have hit civilian hospitals, schools, religious sites, the infamous strike on a theater in Mariupol, a busy railway station of civilians attempting to flee for their lives. There have been clear examples of Russia's brutality that amount to war crimes, and we have made public our assessment that Russia's forces have committed war crimes in the context of this campaign.

Not only do we continue to stand with our Ukrainian partners to provide them the security assistance that they have put to extraordinary effect to defend their freedom, to defend their democracy, to defend their country, but we have also provided our Ukrainian partners with economic support, with humanitarian support, and we've continued at the same time to impose those significant costs – the costs that we promised well before Russia's – the start of Russia's full-scale invasion on February 24th that you've seen in the form of financial sanctions and export controls.

QUESTION: Do the attacks on Kyiv specifically – do they alter plans for operations at Embassy Kyiv, or none – there's —

MR PRICE: There's been no change in our posture. As you know, we resumed embassy operations at Embassy Kyiv last month. Since then, our team at the embassy has continued to engage with Ukrainian officials, to engage with the Ukrainian people, including representatives of civil society as well.

QUESTION: Russia and Serbia?

MR PRICE: Sure, Russia and Serbia.

QUESTION: Do you have anything on Russia's Foreign Minister Lavrov decision to cancel a planned visit to Serbia after three countries – Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Bulgaria – decided to close their air space to Lavrov's airplane? Moscow has made a condemnation and also a senior Russian official even threatened to – these three countries with a missile strike.

MR PRICE: Well, these were sovereign decisions regarding the airspace of these three sovereign countries. It reflects Europe's commitment to hold Russia accountable for its unprovoked, for its unjustified aggression in Ukraine. We urge Serbia to focus on its stated goal of EU membership, including aligning its foreign and security policies with the rest of Europe.

Kylie.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

QUESTION: Can you comment – I'm sorry – can you comment on Serbia president's decision to host

Lavrov and also Serbia's refusal to implement EU sanctions against Russia?

MR PRICE: Well, to your question, we have consistently urged Serbia to take steps that advance its European path, including diversifying its energy sources, to reduce energy dependence on the Russian Federation, and aligning its foreign and security policies with the EU. We have sought and we continue to seek to be a partner to Serbia to assist in its efforts to enhance its energy security for the long term.

QUESTION: How —

MR PRICE: Anything else on Russia-Ukraine? Kylie?

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

QUESTION: How —

MR PRICE: Sure.

QUESTION: How will — I'm sorry — how will U.S. and NATO ensure, like, these three countries are protected from the threats from Russia? Thank you.

MR PRICE: These three countries that closed their airspace? Well — is that what you mean? Well, all three countries are NATO members, and the commitment to Article Five on the part of all three is ironclad. Of course, we marked Montenegro's fifth anniversary of NATO membership just yesterday, and North Macedonia's second anniversary in March.

Kylie.

QUESTION: Just on the food crisis, can you just bring us up to date on efforts to get grain out of Ukraine? It's been a few weeks now since Blinken made his plea to the UN for countries to get on board, so where are you guys at? Are there routes out of the country that have been identified and are up and running at this time?

MR PRICE: We have continued to be in very close dialogue and communication with key partners in this effort — with our European allies, with Turkey in terms of its efforts, and with the UN. And just

last week, a UN delegation briefed the United States, including senior members of our team here, on efforts to coordinate maritime security on the Black Sea. Of course, we don't comment on the details of these private discussions, but this has been a priority topic of discussion with our counterparts at the UN. We'll continue that close coordination with the UN delegation and with the Government of Ukraine on ways to mitigate impacts of global food insecurity from President Putin's war in Ukraine.

This is a war that not only has brutalized, and in many ways terrorized, the people of Ukraine, but it has put at risk food security around the world. There are approximately 84 merchant ships, some laden with wheat and corn, and about 450 seafarers are trapped at Ukrainian ports. Not only is there grain aboard these vessels, but there are about 22 million tons of grain sitting in silos near the ports that also needs to move out to make room for the newly harvested grain. In addition, Russia has actually taken aim at ships at sea. They have taken aim at grain silos. They are continuing to effectively implement what amounts to a blockade of Ukraine's ports.

So we are having conversations, of course, with Ukraine in the first instance, but also with important allies and partners coming out of the Secretary's engagements in New York last month, where he led the session at the UN Security Council, and also in the General Assembly. That was billed as a call to action. We feel that we were successful in bringing together much of the world to focus on this problem. The challenge is now clearly in sight, and we are working closely with countries in the region to help to facilitate the export of Ukraine's grain and other foodstuffs. But we're also working with countries who have been impacted by Russia's blockading of the ports, Russia's targeting of vessels containing wheat and other foodstuffs. We'll continue to keep the focus on this.

Janne.

QUESTION: Do you have estimation for when that dialogue will lead to movement of the grain?

MR PRICE: This is something that we are working on every single day, so I can't put a date on it, but it is among our highest priorities here. As you know, the Secretary later today will actually convene a group of stakeholders from the NGO community and also from the private sector together with Secretary Vilsack. When it comes to the challenge of Russia's war against Ukraine, this has been a – among our highest priorities, because the impacts of Russia's action are not only confined to what they're doing inside Ukraine, but countries around the world, including countries in Africa – both North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa – have really borne the brunt of this. Ukraine, until Russia's

invasion, was a breadbasket for the world – exports of wheat, exports of fertilizer.

Russia too has the potential to export its wheat, its fertilizer, its other foodstuffs. We have been very deliberate and careful in designing our sanctions policy. Contrary to what the Russian Federation is putting forward, there are very clear and delineated carveouts in our sanctions policy to ensure that we are doing absolutely – to ensure that we aren't doing anything that would limit or otherwise constrict Russia's ability to export food and fertilizer.

QUESTION: Ned, just super quickly on Kylie's question. Lavrov's going to Turkey on Wednesday. Is that, like, a big meeting that you guys are also following, and would you expect maybe, like, a breakthrough after that on the grain issue?

MR PRICE: I don't know if we should expect breakthroughs. Of course we'll be watching closely. We'll be talking with our Turkish allies in the aftermath of that visit. Again, we are supporting all diplomatic efforts that are carefully and closely coordinated with Ukraine – nothing about Ukraine without Ukraine – that have the potential to increase Ukrainian exports of food and fertilizer to the global marketplace.

QUESTION: And just so – when you say we shouldn't expect breakthroughs, so you don't necessarily see this, like, meeting over there as, like, unlocking anything or, like, leading to results. You mean to say that this is still going to be a long haul; it's going to take more than that.

MR PRICE: This is a challenge that has built up since February 24th when Russia began its war on Ukraine. You have referred to a meeting between two countries, Russia and Turkey, neither of which, of course, is Ukraine. So I am confident that one meeting alone won't be able to solve this challenge. This will be a challenge that will, of course, need to involve Ukraine at the center of anything that we collectively do to facilitate the export of Ukrainian food and fertilizer.

Janne.

QUESTION: Thank you, Ned. I have two questions on —

QUESTION: Can we ask one more on Russia, please? On – one more, please.

MR PRICE: Okay.

QUESTION: The new sanctions —

QUESTION: These locations, you know, not —

MR PRICE: We'll do two more on Russia/Ukraine, and then I promise we'll move on. I'll come right back to you, Janne; sorry. Alex, you've already had one, so let me just, for equity, go back. Michele.

QUESTION: Yeah, the new sanctions that Russia impose today on U.S. personalities and secretaries.

MR PRICE: I don't have a reaction other than the fact that I think it highlights the asymmetry between our countries. Of course, the United States is a banking center; it's a financial center. It is a country where citizens from the world seek to travel to, where citizens from the world seek to educate themselves and their families. So of course there's always going to be an inherent asymmetry between the steps that the Russian Federation puts forward and what we, together with our allies and partners, do in response to Russia's brutal war against Ukraine.

Janne.

QUESTION: Thank you, Ned. I have two questions on North Korea and China. North Korea fired eight ballistic missiles yesterday. What actions did United States take immediately in response to North Korea's missile launch?

MR PRICE: Well, I would refer you to the Department of Defense, and they can share details of the live-fire exercises that they conducted in the aftermath of the most recent provocations. But as you've likely heard, we did condemn the DPRK's multiple ballistic missile launches. These launches are in violation of multiple UN Security Council resolutions. They pose a threat to the DPRK's neighbors and to the international community more broadly. As you've heard from us before, we do remain committed to a diplomatic approach to the DPRK. We call on them to engage in dialogue. At the same time, we have an ironclad commitment to our allies in the ROK in Japan. And not only is our deputy secretary of state in Seoul at this very moment, where she will have an opportunity to engage bilaterally with her South Korean and Japanese counterparts, but also trilaterally, underscoring the importance of trilateral engagement and coordination.

It also happens that our Special Envoy for the DPRK Sung Kim is also in South Korea, and he too has been in touch with his trilateral counterparts – his South Korean, his Japanese counterparts. He was

in immediate or near-immediate contact with them in the aftermath of the most recent provocations. That coordination will continue, but just as importantly, that shared resolve to confront this challenge and to find ways to advance what is our overarching objective, the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, that will remain front and center in our trilateral agenda.

QUESTION: But China said – China noted that North Korea fires missiles because the United States did not engage in dialogue within North Korea. What is the U.S. position on China's claims of responsibility to the United States for North Korea's missile provocations?

MR PRICE: Well, I won't comment on the PRC's characterization of our policy, but I'll make very clear what our policy is. Our policy is to seek dialogue, to seek engagement with the DPRK. Any country that puts the responsibility on us for the lack of dialogue, the lack of engagement, is either ill-informed or is propagating falsehoods. And the fact is that we have made clear for months now, since the earliest days of this administration, that we believe that diplomacy and dialogue provides the most effective means by which to promote our shared objective, a shared objective that emanated from a comprehensive policy review that we conducted last year, where we determined that our goal, a goal we now share with our trilateral allies, is the complete denuclearization of the DPRK.

We believe we can achieve that most effectively through diplomacy and dialogue, which we have consistently offered. We have made clear both publicly and privately to the DPRK that we harbor no hostile intent towards the regime. Much to the contrary, it would be far preferable if we were able to engage in that diplomacy and dialogue.

QUESTION: But this issue goes to UN Security Council resolutions. But if China and Russia will veto, so how are you going to be responsible for this again, repeated these issues all the time, China and Russia's vetoes. How are you going to respond to this?

MR PRICE: Well, we have called on members of the international community, certainly members of the UN Security Council's permanent five, to be responsible stakeholders in the UN Security Council as a preeminent forum for addressing threats to international peace and security.

When it comes to security in North Asia, in this particular region, there is no greater threat to international peace and security. So it is incumbent on all members of the international community to enact and to continue to abide by international sanctions. It is profoundly disappointing, as you

heard from Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield late last month, that certain members of the P5 have not fulfilled the obligations that they have as members of the P5 – again, an organization that is charged with being the preeminent forum to discuss threats to international peace and security. But all the while, we will continue to promote accountability. There are other means by which we can promote that accountability. We have our own authorities. Our partners and allies have authorities that we can coordinate just as we work on defense and deterrence together with our partners in the region.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

QUESTION: Could we follow-up upon North Korea?

MR PRICE: One more on North Korea and then we'll move on.

QUESTION: Then Afghanistan.

QUESTION: Thank you, Ned. Just following up on Janne's point on China and Russia, how can the U.S. respond if the DPRK were to conduct a nuclear test? Would you be – would unilateral actions be the only option left to the U.S., given China and Russia's veto at the UN Security Council?

MR PRICE: Unilateral actions are never going to be the most attractive or even the most effective response, and that is especially the case because we are gratified that we have close allies in the form of Japan and the ROK bilaterally, trilaterally. There are a number of allies and partners of ours, not only in the Indo-Pacific but around the world, who understand and appreciate the threat that's posed by the DPRK's WMD programs – that is to say, its nuclear weapons program and its ballistic missiles program.

So we remain concerned that the DPRK could seek a seventh nuclear test in the coming days. It's a concern we've warned about for some time. I can assure you that it is a contingency we have planned for, and it has been a concerted topic of discussion with allies and partners.

Yes.

QUESTION: And then just quickly, after last month's vote, Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield said that the U.S. would continue to seek unity and compromise at the UN with regard to the DPRK. Given

that China, Russia were the only two who vetoed, has the ambassador engaged directly with China and Russia how to move forward —

MR PRICE: I would need to refer you to her team for that. We do engage regularly our partners in New York on this. But for any particular conversations, I need to refer you to her.

Afghanistan? Nazira.

QUESTION: Thank you very much. As you know, Taliban establishing a good relationship with India. Indian officials visited the Taliban in Kabul, and they agreed to train some personal security people, maybe army, police or something else. Do you have any comment on that? Although Pakistan and Indian relationship is worse. They don't have any good relation. Taliban, they get two part. One go to India and the other one maybe there. (Inaudible.)

MR PRICE: Well, there are a number of countries around the world that have a discrete set of interests in Afghanistan and who predicate their engagement with the Taliban on those interests. We too have interests when it comes to Afghanistan. We've spoken to many of them. It is human rights, respecting the basic and fundamental human rights of all of Afghanistan's citizens, including its women and girls, its minorities; ensuring safe passage for those who wish to depart the country — of course, that includes for U.S. citizens, for LPRs, for those who have worked on behalf of the United States Government over the years as well.

It is inclusive governance and doing what we can to support the formation of a government that represents the Afghan people, including their aspirations; the counter-terrorism commitments that the Taliban has committed itself to, both publicly and privately, including vis-à-vis al-Qaida, but also ISIS-K; and of course the idea that no legitimate entity should hold hostages, and in the case of Afghanistan, Mark Frerichs continues to be on our mind. We've made very clear that for our relationship to improve whatsoever with the Taliban, we'll be looking very carefully at their actions towards Mark Frerichs, who has been in custody for far too long.

India similarly has a set of interests when it comes to the Taliban. Different countries will engage with the Taliban in different ways. We have a team on the ground in Doha that is responsible for, as appropriate, engaging with the Taliban on our set of interests just as other countries do.

QUESTION: Thank you.

MR PRICE: Yes. Let me move around. Yes, sir.

QUESTION: Foreign Policy Advisor to the President of Azerbaijan Hikmet Hajiyev scheduled to meet with Assistant Secretary of State Karen Donfried at the State Department. What issues will be discussed?

MR PRICE: Well, as you alluded to, Assistant Secretary Donfried will meet with the Foreign Policy Advisor Hajiyev in Washington today. The advisor is also having meetings with several other administration officials, including our National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan. Assistant Secretary Donfried will convey to Mr. Hajiyev the U.S. interest in facilitating direct engagement between Azerbaijan and Armenia, including our role as a Minsk Group co-chair and our support for recent EU efforts to bring both countries together. This is something that Secretary Blinken has had an opportunity to engage with the leaders of these two countries on in recent days and recent weeks. It continues to be something we wish to promote.

QUESTION: Thank you.

MR PRICE: Yes.

QUESTION: Can I follow up —

MR PRICE: Let me move around, Alex. Just let me try and – yes.

QUESTION: Appreciate it, Ned. Thank you. Is there a change in your position on the sale of F-16s to Turkey?

MR PRICE: We have – we continue to discuss with our NATO Ally how we can work together as Allies. Of course, we don't speak to any transactions that have not been notified to Congress. Turkey has made no secret of its desire to invest more heavily in the F-16 program. That's not something that we're in a position to speak to publicly.

QUESTION: And then the SDF commander in Syria, Mazloun Abdi, he says that in the event of Turkish invasion into northeast Syria, they will allow Assad regime's air defense to protect the region's skies. Do you have a position on that?

MR PRICE: Well, our position is one that you've heard for some time now, ever since this hypothetical, ever since this potential operation was first raised. We have emphasized that we remain deeply concerned about discussions of potential increased military activity in northern Syria, and in particular, its potential impact on the civilian population there. We have continued to call for the maintenance of existing ceasefire lines. We would condemn any escalation beyond those lines. It's crucial for all sides to maintain and to respect those ceasefire zones to enhance stability in Syria and to work towards a political solution to the conflict.

I've previously made the point that we expect Turkey to live up to the commitments that it made in October of 2019, including the commitment to halt offensive operations in northeast Syria. Any new escalation beyond those existing ceasefire lines could prove to be especially costly setbacks – costly setbacks to our collective efforts to counter Daesh, the efforts of the counter-ISIS coalition, but also to our efforts to promote political stability within Syria.

QUESTION: If I may, Ned, in the previous administration, before the last Turkish invasion into northeast Syria, the administration was calling on Turkey the same things that you're calling Turkey, and that didn't work, obviously. Are you optimistic that this time there will be anything different?

MR PRICE: Look, I want to be optimistic about it. I don't want to be pessimistic about it. What we can do is to make very clear where the United States of America stands on this. This is something that we have had an opportunity to discuss, including at senior levels, with our Turkish allies. We've made very clear to them our concerns with any renewed offensive in northern Syria.

Said.

QUESTION: Ned, thank you. On the Palestinian-Israeli issue, Ned, yesterday marked the 55th anniversary of the '67 war. That's 55 years of occupation for the Palestinians that they had to endure and still endure. I think over a period of 24 hours, four Palestinians were killed. They held a three-year-old child and they made him take off his t-shirt at a checkpoint. The whole world saw that.

So my question to you – I mean, I know you don't want to express any optimism or pessimism – how long this should – this thing should go on? I mean, hasn't – is it time for this occupation to end? I mean, morally speaking, how much should this military occupation go on, generation after generation?

MR PRICE: Said, our goal from the first day of this administration has been to do everything that we can to promote and to advance a two-state solution precisely because a two-state solution, we believe and successive American administrations have believed, is the most effective means by which to secure Israel's identity as a Jewish and democratic state, but also to fulfill the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people to live in dignity and security and peace in a country of their own. This has been at the heart of our policy. We have spoken out against steps that have the potential to be setbacks towards the prospect of a two-state solution.

QUESTION: So can you tell us at least one thing that you have done to bring this solution, this two-state solution, a bit closer in the last six months?

MR PRICE: Said, we have also been clear that we are not on the cusp, unfortunately, of a two-state solution. We're likely not even on the cusp of direct negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians to discuss the contours of a two-state solution. Our goal since the very start has been to set the stage to create an environment in which diplomacy, including diplomacy toward – between Israelis and Palestinians is more likely to be effective. And I can point to a number of steps that we have taken, including the resumption of humanitarian funding for the Palestinian people, including the resumption of contact between the United States and the Palestinian leadership. That is something that unfortunately had taken a hit in the last administration. We think it was profoundly counterproductive to the prospects of stability in the region, to the prospect ultimately of a two-state solution.

QUESTION: And the last administration, they closed the consulate that was open for so many – for a long, long time. And you have not taken any steps to reopening that.

But I know you don't like me to cite figures and numbers, but I'm going to tell you a couple of figures. Since the beginning of the year, 14 Palestinian kids – children – have been killed by the Israelis. Over the past 55 years, 1.5 million Palestinians have been imprisoned, most of them unfairly – most of them unfairly. Including administrative detentions. Can you at least tell your allies, the Israelis, that they should end this practice of administrative detention?

MR PRICE: Said, we've been very clear where we stand. We believe Israelis and Palestinians deserve equal measures of stability, of security, of freedom, and importantly of dignity. That is really at the heart of our efforts to set the stage for a two-state solution. It's been at the heart of everything we have attempted to do in the region.

Yes, sir.

QUESTION: Hi. There was a *Washington Post* story saying that the PRC is secretly building a naval facility in Cambodia for the exclusive use of its military. That's supposed to be a ground station for the BeiDou navigation technology. Do you have any comment about that?

MR PRICE: I don't have a comment on the specific story you reference, but it is consistent with credible reporting we've seen from the PRC – that the PRC is engaged in a significant ongoing construction project at Ream Naval Base. As we've said, an exclusive PRC military presence at Ream could threaten Cambodia's autonomy and undermine regional security as well. We and countries in the region have expressed concerns about the lack of transparency on the intent, the nature, the scope of this project, as well as the role that the PRC military is playing in its construction and in its post-construction use of the facility.

The Cambodian people, neighboring countries, ASEAN, and the region more broadly would benefit from more transparency. We've made a very similar point in terms of the Pacific and the Pacific Island nations. We have seen the PRC attempt to put forward a series of shadowy, opaque deals that they would like to see signed in the dead of night with no input or transparency, and even limited visibility on the part of the governments in question. So this has been a pattern on the part of the PRC.

QUESTION: Sorry, Ned. What's the date on that guidance you just read?

MR PRICE: Sixth of June, 2022.

QUESTION: Well, okay. Does it give any metadata? (Laughter.) When did you first start raising your concerns about the Chinese construction at Ream?

MR PRICE: It was last year, I can tell you.

QUESTION: Was it more like two years ago? Maybe it was before – before your time.

MR PRICE: I wasn't here two years ago, but I can tell you this administration has been consistent in that.

QUESTION: Yeah, well, is there something that has happened new other than this just one report that has increased your concern?

MR PRICE: I will tell you, Matt, we – I am happy to take any and all questions that people throw my way. Your colleague asked me a question about —

QUESTION: No, no, I understand that. I'm just wondering —

MR PRICE: — concern of Ream Naval Base, so —

QUESTION: No, I just want to know if there's any – why – is the concern greater than it was, like, a year ago?

MR PRICE: I don't – I can't tell you why *The Washington Post* wrote that report.

QUESTION: I'm not asking you that. I'm asking you about your response to the question, which is that – like, has the concern increased for some reason?

MR PRICE: Our concern certainly has not abated.

QUESTION: Okay.

MR PRICE: Humeyra.

QUESTION: Just one thing on the Summit of Americas. You said representatives of Guaidó will participate. So you guys don't expect him to show up?

MR PRICE: We will have more details on the mechanics and the specifics of participation, I am sure, in the coming days.

QUESTION: Yes, but I mean, is he coming or not?

MR PRICE: We will have more details on all of that as the week unfolds.

QUESTION: Are these representatives participating in person or virtually?

MR PRICE: It's a different way of asking the same question, and I will give you the same answer. We will —

QUESTION: No, no. I mean, are the participants coming in person, or are they going to be in a laptop screen?

MR PRICE: I can understand the interest you have in this, and we will have —

QUESTION: Yes, it's tomorrow. (Laughter.)

MR PRICE: We will have answers for you throughout the course of the week. Yes.

QUESTION: Ahead of the Security Council vote on cross-border operations for Syria next month, how concerned is the U.S. that Russia will dismantle what remains of that cross-border mechanism? And is there any dialogue with the Russians at the UN right now on this?

MR PRICE: So I would need to refer you to my colleagues at the UN to speak to their engagement on this. But as you know, Linda Thomas-Greenfield was just in the region late last week. She went there to put a spotlight on the indispensability of this remaining border crossing. It is a border crossing that facilitates much needed, desperately needed humanitarian support for the Syrian people.

We – the United States believes, and many of our allies and partners around the world believe, that we should not allow the profound differences we have with Russia or any other country to stand in the way of humanitarian assistance to make it to the people of Syria. This is not something that should be treated as a bargaining chip. This is not something that should be used for political favor or advantage. This is about lives. This is about livelihoods. This is about the ability of millions of Syrians who are at grave risk of food insecurity to continue to subsist and to live.

QUESTION: But just to follow up, how would you describe contingency planning for if they succeed in shutting it down?

MR PRICE: Our focus right now is on a reauthorization of the border crossing. I wouldn't want to get into contingency planning.

Yes.

QUESTION: Just a more general question on nuclear threats, because the IAEA chief pointed to evidence that both North Korea and Iran are making great strides in this arena. Now, you've outlined the administration's strategy for diplomacy, but taken as a whole is any of this a wakeup call that it's time maybe for a recalibration?

MR PRICE: For a recalibration of?

QUESTION: Of your strategy.

MR PRICE: Of our strategy towards the DPRK and Iran?

QUESTION: On nonproliferation.

MR PRICE: Look, we have a strategy towards both countries. Obviously, they're very different countries entailing very different strategies.

When it comes to the DPRK – we have already talked about this to some extent during the briefing – our objective is to see the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. We believe we can achieve that most effectively through dialogue and diplomacy. We are doing what we can to signal very clearly to the DPRK regime that we are ready, willing, and able to engage in that dialogue and diplomacy.

Now, it is no secret as we've already talked about in the course of this briefing that the DPRK appears to be in a period of provocation. This has tended to be cyclical. We've seen periods of provocation; we've seen periods of engagement. It is very clear at the moment that we are in the former. We are doing what we can to give way to a period that is marked more by the latter.

When it comes to Iran, look, the unfortunate reality is that Iran's nuclear program was in a box. It was in a confined box until May of 2018, when the decision was made on the part of the previous administration to essentially give Iran a get out of nuclear jail free card. And since then Iran has been in a position to advance its nuclear program in ways that would have been prohibited under the JCPOA and to do so in the context – in a context where we have not had the stringent verification and monitoring regime that the JCPOA affords us.

So in one sense we know a very credible solution to the challenge we face with Iran's nuclear program, and that's the JCPOA. Now, it remains a very big question mark as to whether we will get there. Regardless of whether there is a JCPOA or not, President Biden has committed that Iran will never be in a position to obtain a nuclear weapon. If we are in a position to mutually return to compliance with the JCPOA, that will be the vehicle by which we fulfil that commitment, but we are equally determined and we are engaging with allies and partners around the world in the absence of a JCPOA to ensure that even in the case that we are unable to get there that Iran will not be able to acquire a nuclear weapon.

Rich, there.

QUESTION: One more on the summit.

MR PRICE: Let me please go to Iran. We've covered Summit of America pretty extensively, I think.

QUESTION: On Saudi Arabia, there appears to be two major delegations coming to visit the United States, the commerce minister in the middle of this month and the investment minister at the end. Are those precursors to a meeting with MBS, or is there any more detail you can provide on a potential meeting there?

MR PRICE: I'm not in a position to provide any more detail on potential presidential travel. As you know, the White House has said that they are working on a visit to the Middle East. He has accepted an invitation from Prime Minister Bennett of Israel to travel to Israel in the coming weeks, and we may have more to say, or I should say the White House I expect will have more to say on that front at the appropriate time.

What we are doing with Saudi Arabia is precisely what we are doing with countries around the world, and that is forging a relationship that first and foremost advances U.S. interest. Just as the President was recently in Japan and South Korea engaging with the leaders of ASEAN, he'll be at the Summit of the Americas this week. Our engagements with countries around the world are predicated on the idea that these relationships need to serve American interests and to be consistent with American values.

I think over the course of the past 16 months we have been in a position to forge a relationship with Saudi Arabia that does that. And you saw another piece of evidence just last week when it was

announced by the UN another extension, or I should say an extension, a two-month extension, to the humanitarian truce in Yemen. This, of course, would not have been possible without the tireless efforts of Special Envoy Lenderking under the direction of Secretary Blinken and President Biden, but of course the UN Special Envoy Hans Grundberg, but also the support of our Saudi partners. We have also worked and Saudi Arabia has done quite a bit to mend regional divides – the exchange of ambassadors with Lebanon, healing rifts within the Gulf as well.

And of course, we have common interests in terms of the threats that Saudi Arabia faces, has faced, from Yemen. There are – these are not only threats to the kingdom and to Saudi Arabia's citizenry, but there are 70,000 Americans who live in the kingdom who have been put at risk by the spate of hundreds of cross-border attacks that we have seen in recent months.

So we are working with our Saudi partners on all of these common interests. We can do all of that while keeping human rights at the center of our foreign policy.

QUESTION: Just one quick question on U.S.-Saudi relations?

MR PRICE: Sure.

QUESTION: I think it was last year that Blinken continued to say that the relationship between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia needs to be recalibrated, and you reiterate that as well. Has that process of recalibration concluded, or are you guys still in the process of recalibrating the relationship?

MR PRICE: Well, in some ways our relationships with countries around the world is like our efforts here at home; we're always striving for a more perfect union. We're always striving for a more perfect relationship. The same could be true of countries around the world. I think what we've seen over the course of the past 16 months with our Saudi partners, compared to where we were in January of last year to where we are now just a few days after the humanitarian truce was extended in Yemen, speaks to the progress that we've seen. It's a relationship that is now on steady footing. It's a relationship that allows us to advance, to protect, to promote our interests, just as we have continued to put values – values we share with countries around the world – front and center in that.

QUESTION: So it's on more steady footing now than it was last year at this time?

MR PRICE: I think that is safe to say.

Yes. Let me – yes, sir.

QUESTION: On Taiwan.

MR PRICE: Yes.

QUESTION: Taiwan's opposition party leader, Eric Chu, is in Washington right now. Is there any plan that a State Department official will meet him here in the State Department?

MR PRICE: I am not aware of any planned meetings, but we will let you know if we have anything to read out.

Yes.

QUESTION: Ned, going back to Iran, now that the first day of the IAEA Board of Governors meeting has opened, I guess you can talk more about the report on Iran. The director general said that Iran has a considerable amount of enriched uranium and it could be only weeks before it could have enough fissile material for a bomb. Is that the same timeline you're looking at, the Biden administration is looking at, for calling it quits with the negotiations should Iran not do anything to revive the talks?

MR PRICE: We share a great deal of information with the IAEA. We have full faith and confidence in the IAEA. The assessment that you heard from the director general today is largely consistent with our own assessments. The fact is that when the JCPOA was implemented, when it was fully in effect, the breakout time was about 12 months. It was about a year. In the course of the past two years, that breakout time – or I should say since May of 2018; I suppose that's three years now, four years now – that breakout time has dwindled significantly. We are now no longer talking about months, unfortunately, but we are talking about weeks or less.

The time frame for potentially resuming – mutually resuming compliance with the JCPOA, again, isn't based on a date on the wall. It is not based on a – whether it's a week or a month from now. It is based on assessments that are ever evolving. These assessments are updated based on every piece of relevant information. And as long as a mutual return to compliance with the JCPOA conveys

nonproliferation benefits that the status quo does not, we will pursue a mutual return to compliance with the JCPOA.

As I said, the breakout time that we have now is quite short. The prospect of a mutual return to compliance would still prolong that breakout time fairly significantly if we were successful in negotiating a mutual return to that. That remains a big question mark. We'll have to see what the coming period – where that leads us.

QUESTION: Well, it sounds like you're actually going to wait until Iran is at the threshold of becoming a nuclear state.

MR PRICE: We are not waiting for anything. We are every day engaging with our allies and partners in this effort. And again, as long as it is in the national security interests of the United States, we will continue to pursue a mutual return to compliance. But either way, as I said before, President Biden has a commitment. He has made a solemn commitment that Iran will never be in a position to acquire a nuclear weapon.

QUESTION: Can I ask you about your —

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MR PRICE: Let —

QUESTION: Your phrase you said – because I haven't heard it before. Maybe I have and I've just forgotten about it, but this idea that you said – in response to a question a few questions ago, you said the last administration essentially gave Iran a "get out of nuclear jail free card." Is that new? I don't remember hearing that before.

MR PRICE: I don't recall having said that before, yes.

QUESTION: Okay. So is it – so can I just drill down into that a little bit? Is it your – is the administration's position that the JCPOA was, in fact, a nuclear jail?

MR PRICE: It put Iran's nuclear program —

QUESTION: So it wasn't a nuclear jail?

MR PRICE: It confined it. It put it in a box.

QUESTION: Okay. Well, that's an interesting way to try and get the Iranians – describe it – to describe it, to get the Iranians back into it. You're saying come on into the cell, guys.

MR PRICE: My job here is to —

QUESTION: Fair enough.

MR PRICE: — explain what we're trying to do for U.S. national security interests.

QUESTION: Fair enough, I just wanted – I just – okay. And then the “free” part of it, is it also this administration's position that the Iranians paid no price at all?

MR PRICE: I think you may be reading a bit too much into a comment that was maybe a bit too flip, but —

QUESTION: Oh, okay. All right. Well, I just wanted to – because sometimes – remember we had “sanctions hygiene” that was – and I just want to make sure that I understand where you're coming —

MR PRICE: Yeah. All right. We have gone on for quite a while. I'll take a quick —

QUESTION: I have one on Iran and one on Lebanon. What was the purpose of Special Envoy Malley's visit last week to the Central Command in Florida?

MR PRICE: The special envoy routinely engages with members of the interagency. He works closely with leadership across the government. He in fact leads an interagency team. That team actually includes a senior military advisor. And so he went to CENTCOM to meet with the CENTCOM commander as part of that regular work.

QUESTION: And on Lebanon, do you have any comment on the increased tension between Israel and Lebanon over the off-shore drilling in a disputed area? And are you planning to send Mr. Amos Hochstein to Beirut and Israel on this question?

MR PRICE: I don't have any travel to announce or to preview at this time, but as you've heard from us before, the Israel-Lebanon maritime border, that's a decision for both Israel and Lebanon to make. We believe that a deal is possible if both sides negotiate in good faith and realize the benefit to both countries. To that end, we do strongly support efforts to reach a mutually beneficial agreement.

Alex, last question.

QUESTION: Ned, thank you so much. Two questions on Russia-Ukraine. You also owe me an Azerbaijan follow-up.

MR PRICE: I owe you a what? Sorry.

QUESTION: An Azerbaijan follow-up.

MR PRICE: Ah. Sounds like three questions. Okay.

QUESTION: So Sunday's strikes on Kyiv. Ukraine demands new sanctions in response to Sunday's strikes. It's the first time in weeks. And also characterizes missile attack on Kyiv as an act of terrorism. Do you share that characterization? Was it an act of terrorism?

And secondly, you mentioned Ambassador Sullivan's interview. He was quoted today as saying Russia should not close its embassy in the U.S. I get the sentiment that when ambassador talked about that, this is two-way road. But I wonder how comfortable you are in terms of seeing Russian diplomats wandering around, feeling they are part of international community just as normal after everything they have done on Ukraine, just pick up from where they left off.

MR PRICE: Well, I would dispute somewhat that characterization. Not only is Moscow's economy in shambles, we've seen sky-high inflation; we have seen estimates that the Kremlin – that the Russian economy will contract by between 11 and 15 percent this year; more than a thousand multinational companies have fled the Russian marketplace. But Russia is diplomatically isolated in a way that it never has been before. You should ask Moscow how it plans to vote in terms of the next Human Rights Council meeting, just to give you one example. This is a country that is now, in many ways, a pariah on the international stage. We have seen countries distance themselves from Moscow. This is not only confined to private sector companies.

So that said, the ambassador's point is a completely valid one and one we believe in. We believe that lines of communication, lines of dialogue, are always important, but they are especially important at – during times of increased tension or, in this case, even conflict or war. We want to see those lines preserved. It's why we have been very vocal in speaking out against the unjustified steps that the Russian Government had taken vis-à-vis our diplomatic presence in Moscow. Our goal is to see those lines of communication maintained.

QUESTION: And on Sunday's strike, isn't it – was it an act of terrorism, as Ukraine wants ?

MR PRICE: You can attach any number of labels to it. What we are doing is working with our Ukrainian partners to provide them with the support they need – security assistance, economic assistance, humanitarian assistance – just as we impose costs on the Russian Federation.

QUESTION: And lastly, you mentioned direct engagement on Azerbaijan/Armenia. The Secretary, in fact, offered his help with border efforts. Other than just bringing both sides together, what does that mean in practice? Do you have different maps, or what are you offering that – if Brussels does not —

MR PRICE: During a recent engagement, the Secretary did allude to support for those efforts. It includes border demarcation efforts, ways that we can help Armenia and Azerbaijan continue to make progress in terms of this conflict.

Thank you all very much.

[Department Press Briefing – June 2, 2022](#)

2:17 p.m. EDT

MR PRICE: Good afternoon. Quite a crowd today. You have picked a good day to turn up at the State Department, and I say that because we have a special guest, as you can see. It is my pleasure to introduce Rashad Hussain. Ambassador-at-Large Hussain is our ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom. He's here today to offer some additional remarks on the 2021 International Religious Freedom Report, and then he will look forward to taking your questions.

So without further ado, Ambassador Hussain.

AMBASSADOR HUSSAIN: Thanks so much, Ned. Good afternoon, everyone. Today we released the 2021 International Religious Freedom Report. This comprehensive resource is an indispensable part of our efforts to advance human rights globally. The stories of so many people and the persecution that they face is brought to life in the pages documenting the state of international religious freedom in the report.

The report clearly shows that governments and civil society must collaborate to address

deteriorating conditions around the world. During the past year, we have seen increased repression by authoritarian governments and the politicized use of blasphemy, apostasy, and conversion laws, including against Christian communities. We're also witnessing rising societal violence against communities around the world. We're seeing increasing anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim attacks from Europe to South Asia.

As the Secretary highlighted in his remarks, we remain concerned about members of religious minority groups in countries around the world, including in Afghanistan, Burma, the People's Republic of China, India, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Vietnam. The concerning trend lines in these countries underscore that much work remains to be done.

Yet there is also reason for optimism. We are seeing the progress that is possible when civil society, a coalition of activists, and multilateral bodies work with government, and many – in many cases when they push and when they challenge governments to live up to their obligations. And the Secretary earlier today highlighted just a few positive examples in Morocco, Iraq, Taiwan, and Timor-Leste.

I look forward to the honest, frank conversations with my foreign counterparts and civil society interlocutors that will stem from the release of today's report. We need those conversations to generate and sustain continued progress.

I'd like to thank those of you who are joining us in person and those that are joining virtually for covering the release of this report, and for your interest to these important issues. Your advocacy is critical to continued progress.

And with that, I'd be happy to take your questions.

MR PRICE: Matt.

QUESTION: Thank you. I've got a kind of a semi – there you go. I can see him now. That's important.

This report covers obviously last year, not this year. But since you brought it up upstairs, you talked a little bit about Ukraine.

AMBASSADOR HUSSAIN: Yeah.

QUESTION: And I had something that I'm not even sure is within your remit, but I'm wondering that if we look at this year, particularly since February but also since January, basically, if you have – your office has any concerns about the role that the Russian Orthodox Church has been playing not just in Russia as it relates to the war in Ukraine but also in Ukraine itself.

AMBASSADOR HUSSAIN: Absolutely. Following their unprovoked and unjustified invasion, Russia has targeted religious minorities in Ukraine. The Kremlin seeks to create division, as you alluded to, within the Orthodox Church and has targeted religious minorities and even damaged religious sites within Ukraine.

We've been in communication with the top religious authorities in the Ukraine. I recently actually just met with the Ecumenical Patriarch when I was in Riyadh. And the Ukrainian people continue to inspire the world with their courage. They've used, actually, some places of worship to host refugees. They have been doing phenomenal work – the faith-based communities have – at the border.

And so we will continue as a part of our economic and security and humanitarian assistance to do everything that we can to support the courageous people of Ukraine, and that includes the religious communities that are there.

QUESTION: Okay. Well, I was less focused on the Ukrainian Orthodox Church than I was on the Russian Orthodox Church, and particularly – in particular, the patriarch, who you may have seen the reports today that the EU had him on their sanctions list – this is Patriarch Kirill, I believe his name is – and then removed him because of objections from Hungary. But I'm wondering if the United States has similar concerns about the role that the leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church – not the Ukrainian Orthodox, the Russian Orthodox Church – has.

AMBASSADOR HUSSAIN: Of course, yeah. And as I mentioned, the malign influence efforts that they continue to engage in in Ukraine and elsewhere continue to be of deep concern, and we will continue to be in touch with our counterparts in the Ukraine and other parts of the world regarding the concerns that you mentioned.

QUESTION: Okay, I'm sorry, and I don't mean to belabor this, but you're talking about the church itself, not the Kremlin per se? I guess one of the —

AMBASSADOR HUSSAIN: That's right. That's right.

QUESTION: — that you're talking about. Thank you.

MR PRICE: Shaun.

QUESTION: Thank you. Two questions that are somewhat unrelated, if you don't mind.

In China and Tibet, the reincarnation issue – that's been something that's gotten a lot of attention recently. What are the – what's the trajectory that you see there? I mean, do you see any – do you find that there is more adamance on the part of Beijing perhaps to try to force a reincarnation process for the next Dalai Lama? How is the U.S. reacting to that? Do you find – is there a stance that the U.S. has ahead of whenever the reincarnation issue comes to (inaudible)?

AMBASSADOR HUSSAIN: Yeah. The whereabouts of the Panchen Lama remain unknown since his 1995 abduction by PRC authorities, and actually, May 17th will mark the 27th anniversary of his disappearance. And we are concerned that the PRC continues to deny members of the Tibetan community access to the Dalai Lama – the Dalai Lama-designated Panchen Lama, the second most revered figure in Tibetan Buddhism – and instead continues to promote a state-selected proxy.

So we would urge the PRC authorities to account for the Panchen Lama's whereabouts and well-being immediately and to allow him to fully exercise his human rights and fundamental freedoms in line with the PRC's international commitment.

I actually had a chance to attend an event here in Washington a couple of months ago commemorating the disappearance of the Panchen Lama and at that time as well worked with some of our civil society partners to urge China to end their interference in the succession.

QUESTION: Could I just ask – if you don't mind, just something related – unrelated to that? You mentioned and the Secretary as well briefly mentioned India in the remarks. Obviously, India can be quite sensitive about criticism. I know you're not designating CPCs at this point, but the recommendations from the Commission on International Religious Freedom – how is that decision coming to bear with India? And does the United States actually raise these issues with India despite – in addition to comments (inaudible)?

AMBASSADOR HUSSAIN: Absolutely, and you heard the Secretary's remarks today. The remarks spoke for themselves. We continue to raise these issues regularly with our Indian counterparts. USCIRF is an important partner, and as we collect our data for our report we take their recommendations into account as well. We are concerned with targeting of a number of religious communities in India, including Christians, Muslims, Sikhs, Hindu dalits, and indigenous communities as well. I welcome the opportunity myself to even visit there and continue our discussions, and we continue to encourage the government to condemn violence that we're seeing and hold those who engage in violence against minorities communities accountable.

MR PRICE: Said.

QUESTION: Thank you. Should freedom of religion also cover freedom from religion? And the reason I ask this is because atheists in some Islamic countries and societies could be stoned to death and ostracized. Do you have any comment on that?

AMBASSADOR HUSSAIN: Yeah. Well, when we look at the legal obligations that countries around the world have adopted as part of the UN Declaration of Human Rights, it's for freedom of religion or belief. It's for freedom of thought and conscience and religion, if you look at the ICCPR Article 18, for example. And we speak regularly with our counterparts, including in the countries that you mentioned, to urge them to uphold this freedom. A constant principle that we hear or a constant refrain that you may be familiar with in Arabic is *La ikraha fid-deen*, that there is no compulsion in religion, and so that is a principle that we share and that we continue to raise with our counterparts around the world.

MR PRICE: Janne.

QUESTION: Thank you. There is many religious peoples in prison in China and North Korea right now. How is the United States getting involved in North Korea and China, where there is no religion and the oppression of religious peoples?

AMBASSADOR HUSSAIN: Yeah. Well, China continues to be one of the worst abusers of religious freedom in the world. They have engaged in genocide and crimes against humanity against the Uyghurs. They also continue their repression, as I spoke about, of Tibetan Buddhists, but also Protestants, Catholics, the Falun Gong, Hui Muslims.

We've taken a number of steps. China has been designated as a CPC since 1999. I alluded to the genocide determination. Congress passed and the President signed the Uyghur Forced Labor Act. As you recall, we decided not to send any diplomatic representation to the Olympics. We've implemented a series of financial sanctions, a number of visa restrictions as well.

And with regard to North Korea, we note there that the government continues to execute, torture, arrest, and abuse individuals that are engaged in religious activity, and there's tens of thousands of political prisoners that are being held because of their religious beliefs, which are highlighted in our report. I'd urge you take a look at that. And we're continuing to work with the international community to respond to what North Korea is doing as well.

MR PRICE: Alex.

QUESTION: Thank you so much. Ambassador Hussain, let me ask about the tools that you have or you might want to see in your toolkit to move the needles. When I look at the report on Turkey, Azerbaijan, Russia, I see a continuation of same problems. What I also see is some quiet diplomacy going behind the scene – ambassadors meetings with officials. Are there other tools that you would like to see when you try to move the needle in those countries? One of them also used to be the Secretary's Special Watch List. When should we expect them coming? Thank you so much.

AMBASSADOR HUSSAIN: Yeah. So just like we do every year, we're releasing the report today, and then consistent with our obligation under the International Religious Freedom Act, we'll release the CPC and Special Watch List determinations before the end of the year. But for now, we're – clearly laid out the latest state of religious freedom, including for the countries that you mentioned in our report.

With regard to tools, we are doing our best to use all the tools at our disposal to address these restrictions. We raise individual cases. I do that routinely with ambassadors here in the United States, in our travels overseas. We raise cases of individuals that are being held in prison and being persecuted because of their religious beliefs. We oppose policies and laws that are on the books, such as apostasy laws and blasphemy laws that are used often to restrict religious freedom.

Our report in and of itself is a unique document. It's over 2,500 pages this year. It meticulously goes through the condition with regard to religious freedom in countries around the world. And we believe that highlighting the status of religious freedom country by country, something that is not

done anywhere else in the world, raises the profile of the issues and the cases.

We're also working within multilateral institutions, including at the UN, at the Human Rights Council. We formed a very powerful International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance that now has 35 countries, and it enables us to come together on a weekly basis to discuss some of the difficult trendlines that we're seeing around the world. And then of course, there's sanctions and visa restrictions and other tools.

So you mentioned the toolbox. There's a number of toolkits. We try to apply them in the most appropriate way in each situation to make progress on these issues.

MR PRICE: Let's take a couple final questions. Yes.

QUESTION: Thank you so much, sir. Jahanzaib Ali from ARY News TV, Pakistan. So we heard Secretary Blinken's speech this morning when he talks about religious freedom in many parts of the world. Countries like Pakistan, China, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, and others are in CPC countries. But even after witnessing worst-ever situation of religious freedom in India, this country is still out of red list. So what is preventing State Department to include world largest democracy in CPC countries?

AMBASSADOR HUSSAIN: Well, I think the Secretary's statement today speaks for itself. In India, we're concerned that some officials are ignoring or even supporting rising attacks on people in places of worship. And as I mentioned earlier in the briefing, there's a number of religious communities that are being targeted.

With regard to the criteria that we assess when we're making these determinations, we're looking at countries that either engage in or tolerate or allow severe restrictions on religious freedom, and for the CPC designation, both of those factors are present. And so today we've issued our meticulous assessment of the current situation, and over the next six months, we'll be making our determinations for all countries as to which of them should be included on the lists that we did.

QUESTION: The Secretary – excuse me – also spoke about the blasphemy laws in Pakistan.

AMBASSADOR HUSSAIN: Yeah.

QUESTION: So have you ever talked about this in – whenever you engage with the Pakistani authorities?

AMBASSADOR HUSSAIN: Yeah.

QUESTION: I remember you recently met with Pakistani Ambassador (inaudible) in Washington (inaudible)?

AMBASSADOR HUSSAIN: Absolutely. In fact, for a number of years at the UN, there was a resolution passed with regard to so-called defamation of religion, and Pakistan was one of the leading advocates. And our concern with that resolution is that it is an instrument that gives support or sanction to blasphemy laws, and we work with a number of countries around the world, including OIC countries, including Pakistan – Pakistan was a close partner on this – to eliminate the use of that resolution and move towards the Istanbul process, which we continue to seek to energize today.

Now, there is a number of troubling blasphemy cases that continue today and those are cases that we continue to raise, and I raise them regularly with the ambassador here. And we're – of course, we urge the Pakistani Government, as we have seen in some cases when there's been mob violence, the government condemning them and actually offering support for investigations in those cases. Those are positive steps, but much work remains, and we continue to be in dialogue with our Pakistani partners about that.

MR PRICE: Yes, sir.

QUESTION: Ambassador, thank you. My question is about Georgia. What are the main challenges the country is facing today in regards of religious freedom? And I wonder if you find any attempts of Russian church to increase its influence. Thank you.

AMBASSADOR HUSSAIN: Yeah. Well, I'd refer you to the report and – but the short answer is yes, we are concerned about the influence of the Russian church, as I mentioned, and we urge the government to not only cease engaging in any actions which may restrict religious freedom, but to also take actions when there is societal violence and threats to religious communities, as we've seen in a number of places around the world. We'll continue to use the whole range of tools that I mentioned to address this concern.

MR PRICE: Yes.

QUESTION: On Hong Kong, there was the arrest of the cardinal in Hong Kong in mid-May. Are there concerns that forms of Chinese religious intolerance are going to be exported to Hong Kong in the future? Do you foresee, for example, greater control over Hong Kong religious institutions in the near future?

AMBASSADOR HUSSAIN: We did express in a statement our concerns about the arrest, and we condemn it. And we are concerned, I would say more broadly, about transnational repression, so the efforts to which China is going to to oppress religious minorities not just in their country, but minority groups that are elsewhere. We've seen that with the Uyghurs; we've seen that with other communities as well. So yes, it continues to be a concern and something that our office is watching very closely.

MR PRICE: Sir.

QUESTION: On Syria, your report points out that after the Turkish incursion into northwest Syria, members of minority groups have faced execution, extortion, kidnapping, and destruction of religious shrines. As far as – you guys looked at the issues there. As far as you know, is that because – do these things happen because Turkey allows the armed groups to carry out these acts, or is it because Turkey does not have control over the armed groups there? And is it safe to assume that if Turkey attacks other areas of northern Syria, the same fate will await the other minorities there?

AMBASSADOR HUSSAIN: Yeah. Well, we would encourage the government to not only ensure that they're refraining from taking any actions that would result in increased hostilities, but they are also taking steps to ensure that groups that might do so are held accountable and they're taking steps to present – to prevent any of the types of atrocities that you mentioned.

MR PRICE: Thank you. We'll do a final – Michel, final question in the back.

QUESTION: Yeah. Thank you. Secretary Blinken in his statement mentioned Saudi Arabia. Can you elaborate on that? And we didn't hear anything about Iran from you or from the Secretary.

AMBASSADOR HUSSAIN: Yeah. With regard to Saudi Arabia, we are concerned about the religious freedom situation there. Saudi Arabia has been designated as a CPC country since 2004. They

continue to criminalize blasphemy and apostacy and discriminate against the Shia population within the justice system, the educational system, in employment. I just recently came back from Riyadh. The Secretary mentioned that we are seeing some signs of progress. At the conference that I attended, there was representation, which I think was unprecedented, from a number of major religious communities and from some of their top leaders, including the Ecumenical Patriarch, and there was other Christian leadership there, Jewish leadership, Hindu and Sikh community leaders as well. So we are seeing some positive developments, but Saudi Arabia remains a CPC, as does Iran.

Iran has been a CPC for the past 20 years. They are one – they have one of the worst records on religious freedom. I'd urge you to take a look at the detailed reporting on Iran in our report. Iran continues to target minority groups, Bahá'ís, Christians, non-Shia Muslims. And we have implemented a series of sanctions and support actions at the UN to condemn Iran and their human rights record, and we strongly support the mandate of the UN special rapporteur to investigate human rights abuses there.

MR PRICE: Ambassador Hussain, thank you very much. Thank you to your team as well. We hope you'll come back next year.

AMBASSADOR HUSSAIN: Absolutely. Thank you so much, Ned.

QUESTION: Or come back before then.

MR PRICE: Any day in between.

AMBASSADOR HUSSAIN: All right.

MR PRICE: Any day you're here is a good day for me.

QUESTION: Maybe ahead of the ministerial.

AMBASSADOR HUSSAIN: Absolutely.

MR PRICE: We'll find opportunities.

AMBASSADOR HUSSAIN: Good. Great to see you all. Thank you so much.

MR PRICE: Thank you.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: Thank you.

MR PRICE: I know we've had an extended topper, but if you will indulge me, I have just a couple additional items at the top, before we get to your questions.

First, President Kais Saied's June 1st decrees dismissing 57 judges and amending the rules governing the provincial – Provisional Supreme Judicial Council – they follow an alarming pattern of steps that have undermined Tunisia's independent democratic institutions. We have consistently communicated to Tunisian officials the importance of checks and balances in a democratic system. We continue to urge the Tunisian Government to pursue an inclusive and transparent reform process with input from civil society and diverse political voices to strengthen the legitimacy of reform efforts.

Next, today we welcome the announcement by the UN special envoy extending the truce in Yemen by an additional two months to August 2nd. This extension brings further relief and hope to millions of Yemenis. This is a pivotal moment for Yemen. Yemen has the opportunity to continue this progress and choose peace instead of war, suffering, and destruction. And we also very much appreciate Saudi Arabia's commitment to ending the conflict in Yemen and we thank the Governments of Oman, Jordan, and Egypt for their support in helping secure the truce extension.

We hope the parties to the conflict will seize the opportunity to take further steps to ease the suffering of Yemenis, including urgently opening roads to Taiz city. Most importantly, we hope the parties use this opportunity to begin an inclusive, comprehensive, UN-led peace process. We know that only a durable political agreement and permanent end to the fighting can bring true relief to Yemenis.

As the President said today, ending the war in Yemen has been a priority of this administration from the very start. The United States will remain engaged in this process over the coming weeks and months. The Secretary reiterated that the United States remains committed to an inclusive, durable resolution to the conflict that alleviates the suffering of the Yemeni people, empowers them to determine their future without foreign interference, and addresses their calls for justice and

accountability.

Next, as you saw from the Secretary's statement, yesterday marked the beginning of Pride Month. This is a moment to celebrate the progress we have made and reflect on what more needs to be done to promote and protect the human rights of LGBTQI+ persons around the globe and here at home.

The Department of State is working tirelessly to advance the human rights of LGBTQI+ persons and to understand and address the issues impacting their lives.

We're implementing the President's February 4th Memorandum on Advancing the Human Rights of LGBTQI+ Persons around the world through American diplomacy and targeted foreign assistance.

This is also a moment to acknowledge the enormous challenges facing the LGBTQI+ community globally. In many such communities, LGBTQI+ persons face discrimination, violence, and persecution for being who they are and for loving whomever they choose to love. We will continue to stand with likeminded governments, the private sector, and LGBTQI+ activists and organizations and their allies that are working hard to build just and equitable societies globally.

Here at the Department of State, we are committed to ensuring all LGBTQI+ persons are affirmed and celebrated, and that the human rights of LGBTQI+ persons are respected today, this month, and throughout the year.

We know that countries are stronger when people – regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sex characteristics – are fully recognized as free and equal members of their society.

With that, Happy Pride Month, and I look forward to taking your questions.

QUESTION: Happy Pride Month. I have a Russia sanctions question, but it really isn't quite worthy of being the lead-off question, so I'll defer, unless – as long as before we leave the topic of Russia and Ukraine I can get back to it.

MR PRICE: Promise to come back to you. Daphne.

QUESTION: Thank you. Russia regularly fires missiles from its territory at cities in eastern Ukraine. Does the U.S. believe that international law gives Ukraine the right to respond in self-defense? And if so, why is the U.S. denying Ukraine the right to respond with U.S. weapons?

MR PRICE: Everything we have provided to our Ukrainian partners, everything our allies and partners around the globe have provided to our collective Ukrainian partners, has a singular goal in mind, and that is self-defense. That is to say, this is security assistance that will permit and in fact has enabled our Ukrainian partners to defend their democracy, defend their freedom, their sovereignty, their independence, to defend their country. This is what it has always been about, and we've seen that our Ukrainian partners, as I alluded to a moment ago, have been in a position to put this equipment to extraordinary – extraordinarily good use.

We are now nearly 100 days into Russia's war against Ukraine. There were those in the Kremlin who thought this war would be over within 100 hours, who thought that Moscow would essentially be in charge, in control of Ukraine, at least on a de facto basis, within several days. That, of course, is not the case. Our Ukrainian partners have won the battle of Kyiv; they have forced Russia to narrow its objectives and its war aims. Of course, the battle is now ranging in the south and the east. There is tremendous violence that the Russian Federation is inflicting on the Ukrainian people, including Ukrainian forces but also Ukrainian civilians, in the Donbas at this moment.

But we will continue to provide our Ukrainian partners with what they need to defend themselves. You've heard about the package we put forward yesterday, an additional \$700 million in presidential drawdown authority, bringing our total security assistance to \$4.6 billion since February 24th alone, to \$5.3 billion since the start of the administration. And that is just what the United States has done. There are dozens of countries around the world, including the some 40 countries that Secretary Austin and the Pentagon regularly convene, that have provided their own forms of security assistance to Ukraine as well.

Yes.

QUESTION: Do you even remember what her question was? Because you didn't answer it at all.
(Laughter.)

MR PRICE: Daphne, go ahead.

QUESTION: Yeah, to follow up and clarify, Ambassador Brink held her first press conference in Kyiv and was asked about whether Ukraine had promised not to use the newly announced rocket systems on targets in Russia. She said the range itself is going to be up to the Ukrainian forces. So just to clarify, is the U.S. position or expectation that the systems not be used on targets in Russia? And why is that the expectation of the U.S.? Does Ukraine not have the right to respond to Russia's —

MR PRICE: Ukraine absolutely has the right to respond to Russia's aggression. The fact is that there are Russian forces inside sovereign Ukrainian territory. They have been there in some ways since 2014, but certainly on an expanded basis since February 24th of this year. Ukraine has every right, just as every country does, to defend its territory. That's precisely why we are providing this security assistance.

Now, it is true that we have received assurances from our Ukrainian partners that they won't use this weaponry to fire on targets inside of Russia. The fact is, the reality is – and it's a sad reality – that Russia's forces are on the ground inside Ukraine at locations that in some places are quite distant from the Russian border. So at every step of the way, when it was for the battle of Kyiv, when it has now shifted to the south and the east, we have provided our Ukrainian partners precisely with what they have requested and when they have requested it to take on the dynamics of the battlefield that they are encountering at this very moment.

QUESTION: So the question initially was: Does Ukraine have the right to respond to Russian attacks on Ukrainian soil that are launched from Russian territory?

MR PRICE: Russia – excuse me. Ukraine has the right to defend itself.

QUESTION: But not with – but not with your missiles?

MR PRICE: We have received assurances that the systems that we announced yesterday won't be used against Russian targets on Russian territory, but they can be used to —

QUESTION: Even if those targets are where attacks into Ukraine are being launched from?

MR PRICE: As I said before, unfortunately – the unfortunate case is that Russia's forces are in many places located inside sovereign Ukrainian territory at quite a distance from the Russian border.

QUESTION: In some cases they're not. So the – and so I think it was a pretty specific question: Does Ukraine have the right to retaliate, to defend itself, against Russian attacks that are launched from inside Russian territory?

MR PRICE: Ukraine has every right to defend itself. We are providing Ukraine with precisely what it needs to fulfill that self-defense mission.

Alex.

QUESTION: Continuing what Matt said to you, could they strike Russian territory? I mean, that – to be the devil's advocate, if the Russians are striking Ukraine, isn't it fair that the Ukrainians can strike Russian territory with the same weapons?

MR PRICE: Ukraine has every right to defend itself. I'll make one additional point. Our goal in all of this is to do everything we can to bring this war to an end, to diminish the violence and to put an end to a conflict that was needless to begin with. So we want to do everything we can to strengthen the hand of our Ukrainian partners both on the battlefield but also at the negotiating table. That's why we are providing them this security assistance. That's why we are, including with the tranche of additional sanctions we announced today, continuing to hold the Russian Federation to account.

But we also want to be careful to ensure that we are not doing anything or the international community is not doing anything that would needlessly prolong this conflict. Right now there is only one country that is prolonging this conflict, and of course that's Russia. If Ukraine stopped fighting today, there would be no sovereign, independent country of Ukraine tomorrow. If Russia stopped fighting today, there would be no war today. That is what it boils down to.

What we are trying to do is to strengthen the ability of our Ukrainian partners to defend themselves, to defend their freedom, to defend their sovereignty, to defend their country on the battlefield as we strengthen their hand at the negotiating table.

Alex.

QUESTION: Thank you. I have two questions. One is on the M270 launchers that the UK needed U.S.'s permission before providing it to the – to Ukraine. The announcement came last night, but it was not fully clear whether or not they have your green light. I know that the Secretary had a phone

call with his British counterpart this morning. Do they have your green light?

And separately, you mentioned 100 days that's approaching. Is it fair for us to expect Russia's designation as a state sponsor of terrorism by the time we reach 100 days?

MR PRICE: So on your first question, Alex, I will leave it to our allies and partners to speak to their specific contributions to Ukraine's defensive security needs. What I can say is that dozens of countries around the world have provided needed security assistance. In cases where the commitment is U.S. origin, the Secretary of State has himself signed off on an expedited basis on authorization to transfer U.S. origin equipment to Ukraine when those requests have come in, but I'm not going to speak for other countries in terms of their contributions.

In terms of the state sponsor of terrorism list, the point we have made is that – and you saw this again today – we are going to pull every appropriate lever to see to it that we are holding Russia to account, just as we continue to provide significant assistance to our Ukrainian partners: security assistance, economic assistance, and humanitarian assistance as well.

The state sponsor of terrorism statute is a statute. It is defined by Congress; it is written into law. What we are doing with all of the authorities that are available to us, many of which are written into law by Congress, is taking a close look at that law, taking a close look at the facts on the ground, determining whether the facts are, in fact, correspondent with the law. And if we think any such measure would be effective, we would enact it.

But I will make one additional point: With the financial sanctions that we have imposed on Russia, with the export controls that we have imposed on Russia, we have had an enormous effect on the Russian economy, on the Russian financial system. We have isolated Russia diplomatically and politically in a way that no single designation could do. The cumulative toll of every measure we have put in place has been extraordinarily biting on the Russian economy, and if you take a look at the latest facts and figures, the World Bank projects that Russian GDP will contract by about 11 percent in 2022. Inflation has been soaring, with analysts estimating that inflation above 20 percent for Russia in 2022. Our export controls have been biting. We are choking off Russia's ability to access needed inputs for key strategic sectors – technology, energy, aerospace, defense – the types of sectors that Russia will need to continue to prosecute this war in Ukraine and to continue, for that matter, to potentially even threaten other neighbors. So the cumulative effect of what we've done has really been quite tremendous.

Janne.

QUESTION: Thank you, Ned.

MR PRICE: Oh, before we go on elsewhere, I —

QUESTION: Oh, yeah, no, this kind of ties into that.

MR PRICE: Okay.

QUESTION: It's a sanctions question. Does — I'm just starting to wonder a little bit about these — among the people who were sanctioned today by you guys is your Russian foreign ministry counterpart, who had not been sanctioned before. Was this something that you, like, wanted to do since they sanctioned you, so you wanted to get back at her? I'm just — the reason why I ask this is because when you go after spokespeople, like the Russians have gone — went after Jen, they went after Kirby, they went after you, you guys went after Peskov, and now you've gone after Maria Zakharova, right?

Well, as you said at the time that you were sanctioned, this has zero impact on you. It's not like you were going to go to Sochi on vacation or to somewhere — Moscow. And I'm sure that your counterpart at the Russian foreign ministry, she — I don't know, but maybe she's — she might be more upset about the fact that you revealed her age in the notice, the Treasury notice, than any possible sanctions implication. What is the point of going after spokespeople like this?

MR PRICE: Let me make a couple points. One, I can assure you this was not personal. What I will say is that this individual was sanctioned not because of her specific role, but because she is a senior figure in the Russian Government. We have gone after, as you know, a number of senior figures in the Russian Government, and the spokesperson was included in this latest round.

Two, I would dispute the premise of your question when you talk about symmetry. Yes, I was, shall we say, unfazed when I was sanctioned by the Russians, when I was more recently banned from traveling to Russia, for a couple reasons. I have no particular desire to go there, certainly don't have assets within the Russian economy. I think that is true of my other counterparts and colleagues that have been sanctioned. But —

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MR PRICE: Well, I would not say that. There is not exactly symmetry between the United States and Russia when it comes to the allure of this country, when it comes to the strength of our financial system and the centrality of our financial system. I think it is far more likely – hopefully this is a noncontroversial statement – that a financial transaction would touch a United States entity or touch the United States before it would touch a Russian entity or the Russian Federation.

So the fact of the United States designating someone in Russia is in many ways far more biting than what the Russians would do to us. We are the United States of America. Russia, of course, is a country that is far —

QUESTION: Okay. Well, I mean, you can wave the flag all you want, which is fine, but they're going to wave their flag, too. And I just – I just – I don't – I'm not quite understanding the point of sanctioning spokespeople.

MR PRICE: We are sanctioning senior members of the Russian Government.

QUESTION: But you know what, Russia has —

QUESTION: Did she have assets in (inaudible)?

MR PRICE: I am not in a position to speak to her particular assets. Yes.

QUESTION: Russia has been coveted by the West. It was attacked by the West. When you say that —

MR PRICE: I'm sorry, repeat that one more time?

QUESTION: No, I said that Russia has been coveted by the West, has been attacked by the West, more than – I mean, if we go back to France, by Europe, let's put it that way. So it must have some sort of certain sense of allure, to use your word.

MR PRICE: Russia – explain what you mean by "Russia has been attacked by the West."

QUESTION: You were saying that we have a different country, it's got a lot more attractive things,

and so on. That's how I understood what you said to me. But Russia has – is a great country, and it has been attacked by the West, the West has tried to conquer, to —

MR PRICE: Said, are you referring to the measures we have imposed to hold Russia accountable for its unprovoked war in Ukraine as the United States or the international community attacking Russia? If so, I – we would, of course, dispute the premise of that.

QUESTION: Okay, fine, I take that back. Let me just ask you on the sanctions. Now, the sanctions that you impose on officials, they are on officials. Most of these officials have no, let's say, bank accounts in the West. They have no bank accounts in America. They have – so the sanctions you impose really hurt businessmen, the people that you tried to sort of nurture over the past 30 years and establish relations with and so on, and have some sort of a business exchange environment, not these officials. I don't think Zakharova has any bank accounts in – anywhere. I mean, I assume she doesn't.

MR PRICE: Said, if you look at the most recent tranche of sanctions, what we announced today, I think you will get a flavor for those individuals we are holding accountable for the Russian Government's actions in Ukraine. The Treasury Department targeted prominent Russian Government officials and business leaders, the luxury properties of oligarchs and cronies and elites, luxury asset management and service companies key to the Russian attempts to evade sanctions. The Department of State went after additional Russian oligarchs and elites close to President Putin. The Department of Commerce imposed additional export controls.

So I am not – again, I think I would dispute the premise of your question that we are pursuing those that we need to be reaching out to. We are pursuing those who are in many ways either directly or indirectly complicit in or culpable for the Russian Government's aggression inside Ukraine.

Janne.

QUESTION: Thank you.

MR PRICE: Yes.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MR PRICE: Sure. We'll close out —

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MR PRICE: Yes.

QUESTION: Actually, I just wanted to ask, the question that Matt asked to the ambassador about Patriarch Kirill. Does the United States have any concerns about that, that the EU not sanction him at the behest apparently of Orbán? I know the United States, as far as I am aware, doesn't have sanctions on the patriarch. Is there a reason why he hasn't been targeted by the United States yet?

MR PRICE: I will leave it to our European allies to speak to their specific sanctions packages. We certainly applaud the advancement of the most recent sanctions package. Just as we did today, our European allies – in this case, the EU – has been working on their next tranche of sanctions. We have always said that our sanctions need not be identical. And oftentimes, they are not identical, but what they are is complementary. And we have taken actions that complement actions that our European allies have taken and vice versa with, again, the cumulative goal of having a significant bite, not only on senior Russian Government officials but oligarchs, cronies, elites who are in the inner circle of the Kremlin.

Janne.

QUESTION: Thank you. Really appreciate. I have a question on China and North Korea. I have still jetlag. I'm sorry, so I feel like I wake up right now. And China said that – Chinese Government has said that opposed sanction – new sanctions even if North Korea conduct a nuclear test. How do you comment on what China has said and – but done about North Korea protect?

MR PRICE: That we – I'm sorry. Repeat the last part of that question.

QUESTION: Yeah. How would you comment on what China has said and done about North Korea protect.

MR PRICE: We think it is important, especially in the aftermath of the most recent ballistic missile launches, that the international community, including the UN system, make very clear a statement of accountability and hold the DPRK to account for its nuclear weapons program, for its ballistic

missile programs, both of which are profoundly destabilizing, represent a threat to international peace and security. Of course, the UN Security Council is the world's preeminent forum to uphold international peace and security, and I think what Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield said, when she addressed this late last month on May 26th, was that we are beyond disappointed that the council has not been able to unify in opposition to the unlawful WMD and ballistic missile programs that the DPRK has demonstrated all too frequently in recent weeks and recent months.

We encourage all member-states to fully implement existing resolutions and we'll continue to work with our allies and partners to uphold the sanctions on the DPRK. This is very much in line with what the Secretary laid out in his remarks on our approach to the PRC last week. The same stakes are at play. What we seek to do is to reinforce and preserve and protect the rules-based international order – the rules-based international order, including the idea that no country can engage in, should be able to engage in, provocation or pose a potential threat to its neighbors.

The DPRK's ballistic missile program, its nuclear weapons program, is a clear threat to our treaty allies, the ROK and Japan. It is a clear threat to American citizens and American servicemembers in the region. And we'll continue to work with our treaty allies, Japan and the ROK, along with allies and partners around the world, including those within the UN system, to hold the DPRK to account.

QUESTION: Special – excuse me, Special Representative for North Korea Sung Kim's visit to South Korea, as you know that. He will be discussing this further North Korea's nuclear test. Is – what is there – his – purpose of his visit this week?

MR PRICE: Well, our Special Representative for the DPRK Ambassador Sung Kim is currently in Seoul. He'll be there for the next couple days. While there, he will meet with Japanese Director General for Asian and Oceanian Affairs Takehiro. And he'll also participate in a trilateral meeting hosted by the – hosted by his ROK counterpart.

This is really part and parcel of our bilateral efforts, again, with Japan and the ROK, but also in furtherance of our trilateral efforts. As we have emphasized, the importance of working trilaterally with our treaty allies to hold the DPRK to account, and more broadly, to seek to bring about and to push forward what is our collective goal, and that is the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. That's a goal we share with Japan; it's a goal we share with the ROK. And together, in a trilateral format, we'll continue to discuss ways that we can push forward with that overarching objective.

QUESTION: Ned, on North Korea, did you guys have any thoughts on North Korea taking over the chairmanship of the Conference on Disarmament today?

MR PRICE: It is – certainly, North Korea has been far from a responsible actor when it comes to matters of nonproliferation. In fact, North Korea has been profoundly destabilizing vis-à-vis the global nonproliferation norm.

QUESTION: Well, so does that at all raise any questions about the utility of this organization?

MR PRICE: It certainly calls into question – it certainly calls that into question when you have a regime like the DPRK in a senior leadership post, a regime that has done as much as any other government around the world to erode the nonproliferation norm.

QUESTION: So does that mean that the administration is reconsidering its membership in the —

MR PRICE: I don't have any announcement —

QUESTION: — ahead of the COD —

MR PRICE: Don't have any announcement to make at the moment.

Yes.

QUESTION: I don't know whether you saw the story about the Chinese jets buzzing Canadian aircraft that were enforcing UN sanctions against the DPRK. Has the U.S. also seen an increase in these types of Chinese provocative actions directed at U.S. aircraft or ships that were contributing to this mission of enforcing UN sanctions against the DPRK? And does the U.S. believe that the increase in these provocations, if they have been detected, is timed to overlap with any particular actions that have been taken by the U.S. or the UN in the past?

MR PRICE: Well, I would need to refer you to the Department of Defense to speak to any particular trendlines when it comes to any potential PRC provocations against our forces, our ships, our vessels. We have spoken of PRC's provocative military activity in the region, of course most recently in – its military activity near Taiwan. We've called this activity destabilizing. We're concerned because it risks miscalculation; it undermines regional peace and stability as well.

Yes.

QUESTION: Sir, (inaudible) media reports suggest that al-Qaida and ISIS are getting stronger in Afghanistan and even providing advice and support to the Taliban groups. Sir, is it a concern for U.S.?

MR PRICE: Excuse me, the media report said that ISIS and —

QUESTION: Al-Qaida are getting stronger in Afghanistan.

MR PRICE: And the last part of your question was – are providing support to?

QUESTION: Advice and support to Taliban.

MR PRICE: I don't have a comment on that particular report. I would note, of course, that the Taliban and ISIS-K are, in many ways, sworn enemies. The Taliban has made public and private commitments to keep groups like ISIS-K at bay. Certainly, we have a commitment as well when it comes to threats to the American people, threat to – threats to the homeland. Even though we no longer have a military presence inside of Afghanistan, we're remaining vigilant to potential threats that may emerge from Afghanistan, and we again call on the Taliban to live up to the commitments it has made, the counterterrorism commitments it has made, not to allow such groups to operate with impunity on Afghan soil.

Yes.

QUESTION: Thank you very much. I am Patricia from SPC. Summit of Americas. Next week, the Brazilian delegation is arriving in Los Angeles for the summit and also for the bilateral meeting between President Biden and President Bolsonaro. For United States, what are the main topics to be discussed in a diplomatic level? Is there – are there other meetings being discussed between Secretary Blinken and the Brazilian minister of foreign affairs? And if yes, what are the topics to be discussed, and how do you describe the diplomatic relations between two countries nowadays? Thank you.

MR PRICE: Thank you. So we'll have more details on Secretary Blinken's schedule. I assume the White House will have more details on President Biden's schedule as the summit approaches next

week. What I can say is that this summit will focus on the opportunities and challenges that are front and center for the Americas. It includes economic prosperity, climate change, the migration crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic. So of course, in our bilateral engagements, we'll have an opportunity to discuss each of those with our counterparts, in this case Brazil. We have plenty to discuss in the realm of our economic ties, regional migration, health, climate as well. Food security is another issue that I'm sure will be a topic of discussion at the Summit of the Americas, and, of course, democratic governance and human rights will be the backdrop of this summit as well. So as the summit approaches, we'll have more on individual engagements.

Nick.

QUESTION: Thanks. On the summit, there are reports the administration is considering inviting (inaudible) representative from Cuba to the summit. I was wondering if you could expand on that. And more broadly, what's the State Department doing to prevent countries like Mexico from boycotting the summit?

MR PRICE: I am confident that we will have robust representation from throughout the Americas at the summit. I am also confident that the voices of people throughout the Americas will be reflected at the summit. Not only does the summit – not only will the summit include official government, representatives from government; it will include representatives from civil society and the private sector as well.

We have been in close contact with many of our partners throughout the region. Again, without reading out those discussions, we are confident that the summit will represent – the countries will be representative of the opportunities and the challenges that we face together as partners in the Americas.

Yes.

QUESTION: Thank you, Ned. On Bangladesh, Bangladesh Foreign Minister Dr. Momen provided a list of questions to the Bangladeshi-controlled media reporters to ask the U.S. ambassador in Bangladesh. In an open statement, he said nearly 100,000 U.S. citizens go missing, extrajudicial killing going on in the U.S. as U.S. security forces have killed over a thousand citizen – mostly African American and Hispanic – each year, America do not have the faith in their election process, and he also criticized the blocking Russian media, RT TV, here in the U.S.

Foreign minister circulated this message a day after the U.S. Ambassador to Bangladesh Peter Haas spoke on the U.S. priorities of human rights, democracy, and media freedom, and he said that they want free and fair elections in Bangladesh. What you would say about this authoritarian regime foreign minister remarks? And one more on Bangladesh.

MR PRICE: Well, we have a robust partnership with Bangladesh. As part of that partnership, we're in a position to raise a number of issues, a number of shared interests, but also concerns. And we do regularly raise human rights issues with the Government of Bangladesh. We do that publicly, as I've done before, but we also do it privately. We urge for the strengthening of democratic processes and political institutions, the rule of law, protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, workers' rights and safety, and the protection of refugees as well.

We have worked with the Government of Bangladesh to strengthen these rights and protections. We have provided more than \$8 billion in assistance to Bangladesh since its independence. In 2021 alone, USAID provided over \$300 million to improve the lives of people in Bangladesh through programs that expand food security, economic opportunity; improve health and education; but also promote democracy and good governance, as well as protection for the environment and increased resilience to climate change.

So we'll continue to have those conversations with our Bangladeshi partners.

QUESTION: One more on Bangladesh. Countrywide protest going on against Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for her recent remarks on dropping opposition leader and former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and the microcredit pioneer – Nobel Laureate Professor Muhammad Yunus into the river from Padma Bridge. She claimed that Muhammad Yunus uses U.S. influence to stop the World Bank funding for the bridge construction, so they should punish – get punishment like this. She wants to drop them from the Padma Bridge to the river – into the river. See, she openly remarks, and countrywide protest going on. And ruling party (inaudible) alongside of the law enforcers agency the attacking of the peaceful demonstration. So what is your comment on this?

MR PRICE: As we do around the world, our comment is that the freedom of assembly, freedom of expression, the right of individuals everywhere to protest peacefully – that is a universal right. It applies equally to the people of Bangladesh as it does to those anywhere around the world. We call on governments around the world, we call on security services, security forces, civil forces as well to respect that right, to allow for individuals to assemble peacefully to make their voices heard.

Yes.

QUESTION: I have one on Yemen and then follow – or not a follow-up, separate on Horn of Africa. On Yemen, we've seen the ceasefire was extended for, I guess, 60 days. In Secretary Blinken's statement welcoming the extension, he mentioned the need to reopen roads to Taiz. He did not mention, but you guys have repeatedly spoken about the need to access the *Safer* tank. What – and there was a statement, I guess a joint statement, a couple days ago between you – the U.S. and the Dutch on the need for more funds in the event that there's an emergency offloading operation. What leverage does the U.S. have now to push for those two things as the ceasefire hopefully continues?

MR PRICE: Well, we are at a point now, months into the ceasefire, with the prospect of two more months with the extension that was announced today, where Yemenis have now had an opportunity to see the benefits that greater levels of stability, greater levels of security, the greater benefits that peace can provide. This is the first time in seven years since the conflict started in 2015 where Yemenis have been able to enjoy greater mobility – mobility in terms of within Yemen but also the flights that have now taken place to Amman, to Cairo as well, but the humanitarian relief that has also been able to flow into Yemen given the ceasefire that has now been in place.

The UN has been working, we have been working assiduously with the UN to, in the first instance, extend the truce which was announced today, but also to take advantage of that truce to flow in humanitarian assistance that has been missing from large parts of Yemen for far too long. So rather than describe it as leverage, I think we can make the point that the benefits of peace, the benefits of stability, the benefits of security, and ultimately the benefits of a ceasefire are becoming clear to the people of Yemen, but they're, we hope, also becoming clear to the Houthis as well.

We continue to support the work of Hans Grundberg, the UN special envoy, who's worked very closely with the parties; very much appreciate the efforts of our partners in the region, including the Saudis, for the role they have played in extending the ceasefire that was announced today as well.

QUESTION: And also, on the Horn of Africa, in yesterday's statement announcing the appointment of Ambassador Hammer as the new special envoy, the statement – the latter part of the statement mentioned Ethiopia but failed to mention Sudan or Somalia. And after so much time and diplomacy has been exerted from the State Department on Sudan, and then I guess a couple weeks ago the decision to redeploy troops to Somalia to fight back or combat terrorism – is there a reason Sudan

and/or Somalia were omitted and it was strictly limited to Ethiopia?

MR PRICE: We are absolutely committed to continued robust diplomatic engagement with the Horn of Africa. That includes with Somalia; that includes with Sudan. What we know is that there has been tremendous challenge presented by the violence – the conflict in Ethiopia, a conflict that, with the help of U.S. engagement, including the efforts of outgoing Special Envoy David Satterfield, we have been able to diminish, to certainly bring down in terms of the levels of intensity and, just as we have in Yemen, to restore humanitarian access with additional food convoys, truck convoys that have been able to reach populations in Tigray who have not been able to benefit from humanitarian access for far too long.

So this will remain a priority for us. It's going to be a priority for Special Envoy Satterfield in the remaining time he has in the post, and when Ambassador Hammer takes on the job in the near term, he'll be focused on that as well.

Yes.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

QUESTION: (Inaudible.) How come Sudan and – more so Sudan and even Somalia weren't mentioned? It was strictly Ethiopia.

MR PRICE: We are very much engaged on the challenge that's been presented by the setbacks we've seen in Sudan. Molly Phee, other senior officials have traveled there recently. We're engaging with senior Sudanese officials, military and civilian, civil society as well to try to set Sudan back on the path to democracy.

Yes.

QUESTION: Iain Marlow from Bloomberg. I'm just wondering if I could get a quick question on Turkey. What signs do you see, if any, that Turkey's president is willing to dial back opposition to Finland and Sweden's NATO membership applications?

MR PRICE: I will let the Turkish Government speak to their position on this. As you know, the NATO secretary general was here yesterday. He and Secretary Blinken had an opportunity to speak to a

range of issues as it pertains to the NATO Alliance. One of those issues was the upcoming summit and the candidacies of Sweden and Finland to join the NATO Alliance, something we remain confident that can be completed swiftly. We are in discussions with our Turkish allies. We're also in discussions with our Swedish and Finnish partners. Of course, yesterday there were extended discussions with the NATO secretary general on this topic as well. This is not a bilateral issue between the United States and Turkey or between the United States and Sweden and Finland, for that matter. But as a member of the Alliance, as an Ally and partner to the countries in question, we are engaging as appropriate to see to it that the consensus, the widespread consensus within the Alliance for a swift accession of both Sweden and Finland, is something that we can realize in short order.

Yes.

QUESTION: Can I just follow up?

MR PRICE: Sure.

QUESTION: Yeah, at press conference yesterday here in the State Department, NATO secretary general has said that he will be hosting a meeting in a few days with senior officials from Turkey, Sweden, and Finland. I wonder if Washington is planning a similar meeting, any official from Washington is going to meet with officials from these countries.

MR PRICE: Again, this is not a bilateral issue between the United States and any of these countries. This is an issue between these countries, Turkey, and of course, NATO being at the center of it. I am not aware that we will have any official representation at that meeting, but we'll continue to support our Allies and our partners through this process.

Yes.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) on Iran, (inaudible) the U.S. will seek a formal resolution rebuking the country at the Board of Governors meeting next week. And I think we all know how that's going to go over with Tehran. What do you anticipate will be the repercussions, the impact on those already admittedly dim negotiations to return to the JCPOA?

MR PRICE: Well, just more broadly, we've made clear – and we've spoken to this in recent days – but

our very serious concerns that Iran has failed to credibly respond to the IAEA's questions regarding potential undeclared nuclear material and activities in Iran. And we're continuing to work closely with the IAEA, with the director general, as well as with allies and partners on the Board of Governors as the agency pursues its investigations into the safeguard issues in Iran.

As you alluded to, we are currently consulting closely on the reports recently issued by the director general in advance of the Board of Governors meeting next week, and we can confirm that we plan to join the UK, France, and Germany in seeking a resolution focused on the need for Iran to fully cooperate with the IAEA. It is essential that Iran does fully comply with its legally binding obligations under the NPT and separately with its comprehensive safeguard agreement with the IAEA without further delay. The IAEA, its director general has our full support in carrying out its critical verification and monitoring responsibilities in Iran. As far as any anticipated reaction from Iran, look, far be it from me to try and predict what they might do. Our message is what Iran needs to do. Iran needs to comply with the IAEA in answering these outstanding questions regarding its obligations under the NPT and its comprehensive safeguard agreement.

Yes.

QUESTION: Back to Turkey. You expressed concern over a possible operation in northeast Syria and said that you expect Turkey to live up to its October 2019 commitments in the joint statement. But it's increasingly looking like Turkey won't. Will the U.S. impose any consequences should Turkey invade?

MR PRICE: I don't want to get ahead of where we are. Obviously, no such operation has started. We've voiced our concerns. Setting aside potential consequences from the United States, we know there would be consequences to the broader strategic environment. One of the reasons we are urging Turkey not to move forward with any such operation that jeopardizes existing ceasefire lines is the risk that it could undermine the significant gains that the counter-ISIS coalition, the Coalition against Daesh, has accomplished in recent months and recent years.

At the same time, we know that a renewed violence beyond the existing ceasefire lines has the potential to set back what UN Security Council Resolution 2254 calls for in terms of a political resolution to the ongoing crisis in Syria. So we're concerned on those two fronts. We're continuing to have discussions with our Turkish allies. We're doing that in Turkey. We're also doing that from Washington as well.

Said.

QUESTION: Can I – yes, thank you. Very quick couple questions on the Palestinian issue. First, Axios report that the Pentagon is – had planned to lower the rank of the security coordinator from a lieutenant general to a colonel, and that the Israelis, the Palestinians, and the Secretary of State counseled against that, that he spoke with Secretary Austin. Can you share any information on this with us? Is that true? Do you oppose it a —

MR PRICE: The Department of Defense is in the midst of a global posture review, so I would need to refer you to the Department of Defense to speak to any proposed moves in that regard. Look, leaving aside any particular position, as an administration we believe in the need to re-establish and to continue ties with the Palestinian people and the Palestinian Authority as well, across multiple realms.

QUESTION: Okay. Let me ask you – yesterday the Israelis shot another female journalist, 31 years old, Ghufran Warasneh. She was leaving her camp of Arroub in the – in the – north of Hebron, *Al-Khalil*, and she was shot. The Israeli army claimed that she had a knife. There was nothing shown, it was not proven, and so on. Then they attacked her funeral procession and so on.

I mean, it's – this is becoming so redundant in a very sad way, week after week after week. And obviously, the Israelis have no value for Palestinian life, journalist or otherwise. What is your comment on this?

MR PRICE: We have urged all parties to work to maintain calm, to exercise restraint, and to refrain from actions and rhetoric that escalate tensions and that undercut efforts to advance what needs to be the goal, and that's a negotiated two-state solution. We are deeply concerned by the ongoing violence in the West Bank and Jerusalem that has led to the loss of life. We condemn all violence. We call for calm. We urge all to refrain from actions and rhetoric that escalate tensions.

As you know, Secretary Blinken has had an opportunity in recent days to speak to Abu Mazen, to speak to President Abbas, to speak to Foreign Minister Lapid as well. That message calling for calm, calling for de-escalation, is one that we and he have reiterated in those conversations.

QUESTION: Yet 62 Palestinians have been killed, executed – extrajudicial execution – since the beginning of the year. That's like 13 a month, Ned. I mean, should – shouldn't you call on the Israelis

not to practice that kind of practice, just to kill people because they can kill them?

MR PRICE: I am not in a position to confirm what you just said, but again, we have called —

QUESTION: The figure does not matter. I mean, they have killed a lot people since the beginning of the year.

MR PRICE: — and urged all parties to exercise restraint, to maintain calm, and refrain from actions and rhetoric that undercut the prospects of advancing a negotiated two-state solution.

Yes – sure.

QUESTION: Okay, one last Israeli question, I'm sorry, about the exercise, the military exercises that were just concluded in Cyprus between the Israelis on Cyprus soil. And it is supposed to emulate – or that's what the Israelis are saying – mimic a situation where the Israelis could conceivably attack southern Lebanon. I mean, that's what they said, that's what they told their people, and so on.

Do – how do you view these exercises?

MR PRICE: I don't have a response to that. I think the Department of Defense may be in a position to offer comment.

Janne.

QUESTION: Thank you. On the Taiwan, about the one-on-one economic framework between U.S. and Taiwan, there is backlash from China. What is your comment? Why Chinese (inaudible) – isn't happy with this framework, economic framework?

MR PRICE: Well, you're referring to the fact that yesterday we did announce the U.S.-Taiwan Initiative on 21st-Century Trade. This initiative is held under the auspices of AIT here in – AIT in Taipei and TECRO here in Washington. And we intend to explore ways we can deepen our economic and trade relationship and deliver concrete outcomes for our workers and businesses. In the days and weeks ahead, we will and we do intend to move quickly to develop a roadmap for possible negotiations, followed by in-person meetings in Washington, D.C.

This is a broad framework. The areas of the initiative include trade facilitation, regulatory practices, agricultural trade through science and risk-based decision making, anti-corruption, supporting and enhancing our small and medium-sized enterprises, outcomes on digital trade, labor rights, the environment, standards, state-owned enterprises, and non-market policies and practices.

I can't speak to the PRC's reaction. What I can say is that everything we do in the context of our unofficial relationship with Taiwan is done pursuant to our longstanding "one China" policy, which of course is guided by the Taiwan Relations Act, the three U.S.-China joint communiques, and the Six Assurances as well.

Yes, Shaun.

QUESTION: Going back to Africa. The Secretary met yesterday with the DRC foreign minister. In their brief comments, the Secretary praised the African efforts to defuse the situation with the DRC and Rwanda, I presume it's – what he was alluding to in the eastern – or the eastern DRC. Could you elaborate a little bit of what the U.S. is looking for? And is there any diplomacy on the part of the United States in terms of trying to calm down the situation there?

MR PRICE: Well, there is, and you saw an element of it yesterday. We are concerned about the rising tensions between the DRC and Rwanda. We urge both sides to exercise restraint and to engage in immediate dialogue to de-escalate tensions and hostilities. We support the continuation of the Nairobi Process and we encourage countries in the region to work together to advance peace and security in the eastern DRC. M23, for its part, must terminate their offensive and immediately cease attacks on vulnerable populations. We continue to urge the group and all non-state armed groups operating in the region, in eastern DRC, to cease violence against civilians, to disband, to lay down their arms. The people of eastern Congo have suffered violence and displacement for far too long. We appreciate MONUSCO's efforts in support of the armed forces of the DRC to protect civilians. Just as the Secretary was yesterday, we're going to remain engaged on this challenge to try to de-escalate tensions.

A couple final questions. Daphne.

QUESTION: Let's stay on Africa. Eritrean forces shelled a town in north Ethiopia over the weekend, according to UN documents and regional forces, killing a 14-year-old girl and injuring at least 18 people. Does the U.S. have a reaction to that, and is Washington looking at imposing further

sanctions on Eritrea over its role in the conflict?

MR PRICE: Well, as you know, the President signed an executive order last year that gives us some degree of latitude to hold accountable those who pose a threat to peace and stability in Ethiopia, in the Horn of Africa. We have already exercised a degree of that authority against actors in Eritrea. They have played a profoundly destabilizing role. I don't have a comment on that particular operation. If we do, I'll follow up.

But we have managed to achieve, in close coordination with our partners in the region and the Ethiopian Government and authorities in Tigray, what has been a humanitarian truce. Our goal is to see that truce extended not only in furtherance of peace and stability, but also in furtherance of expanded humanitarian access for people in Tigray that have been denied it for far too long. We would condemn anyone who seeks to undo that progress, and we'll be working together with our partners on the ground to try to preserve that.

Yes, Joseph.

QUESTION: Sorry, one more.

MR PRICE: Sure.

QUESTION: Back on Iran. For the JCPOA talks, *Jerusalem Post* is reporting that Israeli officials have offered or presented a new idea which – for – now the talks are seemingly frozen, for Iran to get economic sanctions, or to have economic sanctions lifted under a new deal but removing the sunset clauses. Can you speak to that at all? Apparently Israel's national security advisor raised this during his meetings – was it this week or last week – in Washington.

MR PRICE: I'm not in a position to speak to any specific proposals, but what I can speak to is the level of coordination we've had with our Israeli partners on a range of issues, including the threat that Iran poses, including the threat that its nuclear program poses to the region and potentially beyond. It was just this week, I believe, just yesterday that the National Security Advisor led a delegation that entailed individuals from the State Department, from the Intelligence Community, and from the White House, to meet with his counterpart, Israeli National Security Advisor Hulata, to discuss a range of issues, including the challenges that Iran poses.

When it comes to Israel, we see eye to eye on the big picture, and the big picture, of course, is that Iran must never be allowed to acquire a nuclear weapon. If there are additional developments in the context of Vienna, we'll continue to keep our Israeli partners fully informed of any such developments. If there continues to be no progress, we'll continue to consult closely with them on the appropriate next steps to see to it that we can fulfill President Biden's solemn commitment that Iran is never able to acquire a nuclear weapon.

QUESTION: Ned —

QUESTION: Is the administration looking to strictly go back to the 2015 deal, or are you – or is the administration now looking at maybe alternatives to reaching the deal but in a different version?

MR PRICE: Right now, we continue to believe that a mutual return to compliance with the JCPOA would be in our national security interest, precisely because it would be a far preferable alternative to the present. The challenge that everyone in this room is familiar with is that Iran in recent years, since 2018, has been in a position to gallop forward with its nuclear program in ways that are deeply concerning, even alarming, reaching a point where its breakout time – that is the time it would take Iran to acquire enough fissile material for a nuclear weapon, should it choose to pursue the path of weaponization – is now far too short. And we want to see that breakout time extended. We continue to believe that a mutual return to compliance is the best way to do that.

QUESTION: Ned, I'm sorry, on the —

QUESTION: Including the – the same deal, including the same sunset clause?

MR PRICE: We continue to believe that a mutual return to compliance with the JCPOA is in our national security interest. There will come a day when that will no longer be the case, and that will be a technical calculation based on the advancements that Iran is making and the assurances that the 2015 nuclear deal affords, in terms of the requirements that it imposes on Iran's nuclear program.

QUESTION: Perhaps let's save the sunset clause issue for another time – some of those sunset clauses have already sunsetted.

MR PRICE: Well, it's —

QUESTION: So – all right. So anyway – but in terms of the IAEA resolution, what changed since when you were opposed to bringing this to the Board of Governors before, almost the very same allegations? Are your concerns now so severe that you think that it's worth the risk of Iran blowing up whatever is left of the JCPOA talks?

MR PRICE: Matt, even in recent days here in this briefing room, you've and others have asked me about recent IAEA reports, reports that, while not yet public, seem to contain additional fodder for concern, for deep concern about the unanswered questions regarding the – Iran's commitments under its comprehensive safeguard agreement and also pursuant to the NPT.

So right now, over the course of the past year or so, we've worked very closely with the IAEA. The IAEA has been in a position to visit Iran, to have inspectors there in an effort to get answers. Of course, they have not been able to acquire all of those answers. We know that Iran has been deceitful in the past. Iran certainly has not been fully transparent. That continues to be the case. So as the IAEA has been in a position to acquire additional information, we have worked very closely with our partners on the Board of Governors, and right now we feel, given the concerns we have, given the information that the IAEA has put forward, that an appropriate recourse would be the one we have talked about, that – our joint resolution that we plan to file with the UK, France, and Germany.

QUESTION: Well, if you're so concerned or if you believe that Iran has been deceitful in the past, at least as it relates to its NPT obligations, why on Earth would you trust them with a nuclear negotiation, to get back into a nuclear deal with them?

MR PRICE: Precisely because the JCPOA has the most stringent verification and monitoring regime ever negotiated. This is about a couple things. It's about putting Iran's nuclear program back into a box, putting back those strict limits in terms of what Iran could be able to do with its nuclear program. But on top of that, layering this verification and monitoring program so that the IAEA can be in a position that they haven't been in a position in for some time – to determine precisely what Iran is doing, to ensure that Iran is living up to the commitment that it previously made under the JCPOA that was implemented in 2016. And if we get there again, which of course is a big "if", to see to it that just as Iran was abiding by the JCPOA prior to the last administration's decision to abandon it, that Iran would be abiding by it once again.

QUESTION: Concerns about the NPT go back well before that. So I don't understand why you're

okay – you don’t trust them and you accuse them of being deceitful on one, and yet you’re perfectly willing to trust them and get into a deal with them on the other.

MR PRICE: Our position is firm that whether or not there is a mutual return to compliance with the JCPOA, the IAEA’s outstanding questions need to be answered.

QUESTION: Right. Well, they weren’t before, remember? The PMDs were never – basically you told Amano the case is closed, so close the case and that’s what happened.

MR PRICE: Matt, if only we had such a relationship with any international organization, certainly not with the IAEA.

QUESTION: Can I change – I just want to get – I want to give you the opportunity to respond on the record now to this allegation that was made in the *New York Times* story about Haiti, that – the allegation was that the United States conspired with France to topple President Aristide back in 2004, in part because President Aristide wanted to – was demanding reparations from France.

MR PRICE: This is an allegation that I now understand has been floating around for some time. It is also an allegation that is incorrect. There was no such collaboration in 2004 to sideline or to oust President Aristide. Ambassador James Foley, who was then our ambassador to Haiti, published an op-ed not all that long ago in response to these allegations. Ambassador Foley wrote, quote, “In particular, the assertion the United States collaborated with France to mount a coup against Haiti’s democratically elected president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, a claim made by French – by former French officials, is not true.” We have consistently said that President Aristide was not removed because of his call for reparations.

Thank you all very much.

(The briefing was concluded at 3:38 p.m.)

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Department Press Briefing – May 31, 2022

MR PRICE: Good afternoon.

QUESTION: The freezing room.

MR PRICE: It is very cold here in today. Hot outside and cold in here.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MR PRICE: Yes, yes. Well, I hope everyone was able to have some time this weekend to perhaps disconnect and focus on what's important. Before I turn to your questions, just one element at the top today.

As we approach the hundredth day of Russia's war against Ukraine, we remain concerned about steps Russia is taking to attempt to institutionalize control over sovereign Ukrainian territory, particularly in Ukraine's Kherson region.

The Kremlin is probably weighing a few approaches: from recognizing a so-called "people's republic" as Russia forcibly did in Donetsk and Luhansk, to an attempted annexation just as Russia did in Crimea. It's a predictable part of the Russian playbook, which is why we are continuing to sound the alarm now, particularly following Russian President Putin's unilateral decree that would fast-track

the issuance of Russian passports to Ukrainian citizens. Russia used similar tactics in Donetsk and Luhansk in 2019.

In Kherson specifically, multiple reports indicate Russian forces have forcibly removed legitimate Ukrainian Government officials and installed illegitimate pro-Russian proxies. One such proxy, quote/unquote, “governor” was installed in April. In May, another pro-Russia proxy, quote/unquote, “official” publicly stated an intent to appeal to Russia to incorporate the Kherson region by the end of the year. Russia has also forced Kherson residents to adopt the Russian ruble over the legitimate Ukrainian currency, according to multiple accounts.

As of late April, Russia likely controlled at least 25 broadcasting towers in Ukrainian areas under Russian military control, including in the Kherson region, and was airing pro-Russia media channels probably to weaken anti-Russian sentiment and public resistance.

This month, Russian officials have increased visits to Kherson, including a visit by Russia’s deputy prime minister in mid-May during which he publicly stated that Moscow believed Kherson has, quote, “a decent place in our Russian family.” This followed a trip by the head of Russia’s ruling party, United Russia, who said Russia would remain in Kherson “forever.”

The Kremlin has also indicated it could attempt a sham referendum to create a Kherson, quote/unquote, “people’s republic” – even though it lacks any popular or legal legitimacy to do so. Before Russia’s further invasion of Ukraine, only about 20 percent of Kherson residents said they viewed Russia warmly, but that support has probably deteriorated since the invasion. Russia is almost certainly failing to gain legitimacy for proxy governments in newly seized territories in Ukraine, as protests persist, and residents refuse to cooperate.

Russia’s initial objectives of controlling large swaths of Ukraine has been nothing short of a complete failure. The Kremlin probably views that forcibly holding Kherson would provide Russia a land bridge to Crimea as well as gaining some kind of so-called victory in an attempt to justify Russia – to Russia’s domestic audiences the thousands of lives Putin’s war of choice has destroyed.

We will continue to spotlight Russia’s territorial designs in Ukraine as well as its ongoing aggression just as we hold to account those who facilitate it, including with additional punitive economic measures. We must also continue to bolster Ukraine’s ability to defend itself in the face of the Kremlin’s brutality. And we will have more on all of that in the coming days.

Matt.

QUESTION: Would you like to preview that —

MR PRICE: I —

QUESTION: — more in the coming days?

MR PRICE: You know I'm not in the habit of —

QUESTION: Well —

MR PRICE: — previewing from the podium, but I appreciate the invitation.

QUESTION: When you say – when you say “in the coming days,” like this week obviously, yes?

MR PRICE: Well —

QUESTION: Or coming days meaning like the next —

QUESTION: Or today?

MR PRICE: Well, it's – so as not to get drawn into a – into a game of definitions, I will leave it at what I said, but add the context that's – on a couple fronts. Number one, you know that due to the commitment of the United States Congress – the bipartisan commitment of the United States Congress – we now have over \$40 billion; and a good portion of that is earmarked for security assistance for our Ukrainian partners.

To date, since the invasion began on February 24th, we have provided our Ukrainian partners with some \$3.8 billion in security assistance, well over \$4 billion since the course of – during the course of this administration. And now that we have significant additional financial resources for security assistance, I imagine you'll be hearing from us before too long about additional security assistance as those conversations with senior levels of the Ukrainian Government have been ongoing.

As you know, Secretary Blinken recently had an opportunity to speak to Foreign Minister Kuleba. It is often during those phone calls that among the various topics they discuss is an assessment of

Ukraine's security needs. Kuleba – Foreign Minister Kuleba often passes along the latest requirements and the needs of our Ukrainian partners. We, in turn, then determine what we have in our stocks, what our allies and partners around the world might have in their stocks, and how together we can work to facilitate the provision of weapons systems that are needed and appropriate on the Ukrainian battlefield. And as you know, Secretary Austin is involved in an effort, the contact group that the Pentagon has initiated with many of our partners to help with that.

QUESTION: Well, so the strategy that you believe the Russians are following in terms of territory, is there anything – is there – does that make – change at all your calculus of what kind of weapons to give to the Ukrainians or —

MR PRICE: Well —

QUESTION: — is that more just of a tactical and strategic thing?

MR PRICE: Well, what has changed our assessment of the Ukrainian needs are a couple things. First, it is the course of this conflict. And in the early days, we and our Ukrainian partners in the first instance, of course, were focused on the battle for Kyiv – the battle for Kyiv that our Ukrainian partners of course ultimately won. During the course of that phase of the war, there was a heavy emphasis, as you might expect, on anti-armor, on anti-air systems that ultimately helped enable our Ukrainian partners to emerge victorious from the battle of Kyiv.

QUESTION: Sorry, I don't want to interrupt, but I don't want you to – the entire history of it is not something I'm —

MR PRICE: No, no.

QUESTION: I'm looking for —

MR PRICE: It's one data point.

QUESTION: — have you changed – has – have you changed your calculus about what would be most effective and useful for the Ukrainians like, say, in the last week or two?

MR PRICE: So that was admittedly a very long sentence. The next sentence was going to make the

point that as the conflict has shifted to the east and to the south, we of course have changed our assessment; and the needs that our Ukrainian partners have put forward have shifted as well. And so, their top priority in more recent weeks was surging artillery systems and munitions to the front lines. Over the course of the last two presidential drawdown authorities, there have been 108 Howitzer artillery systems. During the course of this phase of the conflict, those systems are already being used on the ground.

So, all that to say as Russia's tactics on the battlefield have shifted, the needs of our Ukrainian partners have shifted, and in turn we and our partners have adapted to the realities of the ground and provided our Ukrainian partners with precisely what they need to be effective.

Francesco.

QUESTION: Yes, so not only has the conflict shifted in the east and the south, but in the very last days and weeks Russia seems to be advancing more and more in Donbas. What is your view on that, and do you believe that whatever you will be announcing before too long is capable to help Ukrainians reverse that dynamics on the battlefield?

MR PRICE: Well, it is of course no secret that the Russians have significant firepower. We have been very clear all along that even as our Ukrainian partners have demonstrated remarkable effectiveness that has been in many ways enabled by their commitment and grit, and bravery and tenacity, and of course the security assistance that the United States and our partners around the world have provided, that they would be met with an aggressive force that the Russians continue to field on sovereign Ukrainian territory, that the Russian forces continue to inflict from the ground, from the air, from the skies, and even from the seas.

And so, no one has been under any illusions that the war, the course of the war, the trajectory of Ukrainian success would be perfectly linear. But what we are confident in is the fact that our Ukrainian partners will continue to have what they need to mount an effective defense against Russia's aggression. And we remain confident in the most important point, and that is that when this is over, what will continue to be the case is that Ukraine will be democratic, independent, sovereign, and prosperous. And the United States will continue to partner with our Ukrainian partners during each and every phase of this conflict. The nature of that partnership will shift as we provide our Ukrainian partners precisely what they need to be effective. We've already shifted given the tactical realities on the battlefield. I have a feeling that we will continue and am confident we will

continue to be nimble as the battle moves forward.

Humeyra.

QUESTION: Ned, so in terms of providing what they need, they've been asking for long-range weapons, and the President over the weekend said Washington was not willing to send them systems that can hit Russia, hit inside Russia. But then they actually do have some systems that have the capability of hitting inside Russia. So, could you clarify, like, what exactly the U.S. policy is there? Where do you guys draw the line?

MR PRICE: Well, we continue to consider a range of systems that have the potential to be effective on the battlefield for our Ukrainian partners, but the point the President made is that we won't be sending long-range rockets for use beyond the battlefield in Ukraine.

The core point is this: It is Russia that is and has attacked Ukraine. It is Russia that is starting – that has started this war. It is Russian forces that are inside sovereign Ukrainian territory. And these are the forces that our Ukrainian partners are fighting back against. This is not a battle of aggression for our Ukrainian partners. This is about self-defense for them. This is about preserving their country, their freedom, their democracy, their prosperity and independence. And so every element of our security assistance has been geared towards that goal, and that is the goal of self-defense; it's the goal of, in many ways, self-preservation for our Ukrainian partners.

So it is no secret – and I just made the case – that as the battle has shifted its dynamics, we have also shifted the type of assistance, the security assistance that our Ukrainian partners – that we are providing to them, in large part because they have asked us for the various systems that are going to be more effective in places like the Donbas, where the battle and the fight is quite different from what they encountered around the battle of Kyiv.

QUESTION: But, I mean, the whole idea of self-defense can also be pretty subjective, and so do you guys have, like, a clear criteria or benchmark for Ukrainians where and at what stages, like, these systems that you send them can be used or should be used, shouldn't be used?

MR PRICE: There is nothing —

QUESTION: You guys are stepping into, like, gray area here.

MR PRICE: There is nothing subjective or even gray about the notion that Russian forces are inside sovereign Ukrainian territory, taking aim, killing Ukrainian defenders, but also civilians – men, women, and children. There is nothing subjective about that whatsoever. What we are providing our Ukrainian partners, what we have provided them and what we'll continue to provide them, is designed to enable their efforts to defend their country, to defend their freedom, their independence, and their democracy.

QUESTION: Okay. I'm going to assume that you're not going to answer this. So, I'll move on to just one – (laughter) – yeah – one other thing —

QUESTION: Good assumption.

QUESTION: — yeah, one other thing on Ukraine. So there seems to be some growing divergence between some Western European nations like France and Germany and Washington and UK on the long-term goals of the war. The first group seems to suggest that arming Ukraine with such heavy weapons could prolong the war and perhaps, like, Russia shouldn't be fully antagonized. I mean, what is U.S. response to that kind of thinking? And after three months and the week, do you fully believe that Ukraine is 100 percent able to win this war and you're going to support them for as long as you want? This is related to the whole territorial – potentially territorial concessions debate that started last week.

MR PRICE: So, I will just make the point that there have been many eulogies written prematurely when it comes to the unity of the international community in support of Ukraine. We heard this prior to Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24th; we have heard this at a regular cadence ever since. At every step, the alliance and the system of partnerships that the United States has been indispensable in forging in the months that preceded Russia's invasion of Ukraine, but also since the earliest days of this administration – they have defied those expectations. And I'm not surprised that we continue to hear those eulogies once again, but I am confident and I know that they are premature.

We are united with our allies and partners – in this case, with our NATO Allies, with the some 30 additional allies and partners across four continents that have come together to provide security assistance for our Ukrainian partners, but also to hold Russia to account. And we're united in that goal. We want to see – and we are confident we will see – a Ukraine that continues to be, when this is all said and done, democratic, independent, sovereign, and prosperous. That is our goal. We will

continue to provide our Ukrainian partners with precisely what they need to wage that campaign of self-defense effectively.

I have a hard time understanding the argument that this is about – or this could potentially possibly antagonize Russia, when again, it is Russia that started this war. It is Russia that is on sovereign Ukrainian territory. It is Russia that is raining down missiles and shells and shrapnel and bullets on Ukrainian defenders, but also innocent civilians. So, the argument that Russia could somehow be antagonized doesn't seem to have much credibility.

There is one country, similarly, that has within its hands the possibility of seeing an end to this war tomorrow, and that, too, is Russia. How and when this war comes to a close, that of course will be a matter for the Ukrainian Government to ultimately decide. The Ukrainian Government has been clear, just as we have, that this will need to be ended diplomatically through dialogue, through engagement. We are under the assessment that Russia is not yet at the point where it is ready to engage in good faith, to engage constructively towards what has to be the objective. That is, in the first instance, diminution of the violence, and ultimately an end to this war.

So, in the meantime, we are going to continue to support our Ukrainian partners, including with the security assistance so that they continue to prosecute the mission of defending their country, their freedom, their democracy, just as we continue to hold Russia to account, including with financial sanctions and export controls and other measures.

Said.

QUESTION: You said that —

QUESTION: Hold on a second. You actually said – I've been meaning to ask you this for – this is very brief – when you keep talking about these – all these countries across four continents, you're counting Australia as a continent and not part of Asia, right?

MR PRICE: I believe that's the case, yes.

QUESTION: Okay. So when you talk about, then, Asia – presumably this is North America, Europe, Asia, and Australia. What Asian countries are actually contributing weapons? Or are you talking about, like, they've – some, like Japan and South Korea, have imposed sanctions?

MR PRICE: There are – there's a broad coalition of countries that have come together to provide security assistance and to hold Russia to account.

QUESTION: So both. And Australia as a continent, not a country?

MR PRICE: I will leave it to these individual countries to discuss their contributions.

QUESTION: Okay. Thank you.

MR PRICE: But certainly, several of our Asian allies have been stalwart members of this campaign.

Yes, Said.

QUESTION: Ned, you said that only one country can bring this war to an end. You also said when all this is said and done, and so on. I want to ask you about – what is in it for Russia? I mean diplomatically. I mean, of course everybody wants to see the war end and the conflict (inaudible) and so on. But what are you willing to give the Russians in exchange – you and those in coalition? Would you, let's say, give a commitment that Ukraine could never become a member of NATO, that you will look at the Russian points of concern, the security demands or whatever, that were made back in December, and all these things?

MR PRICE: Said, I think that is a question that may rest on a faulty premise. I don't believe it is for us to have to answer what a country that is waging a war of choice, a war of aggression, an unnecessary – a needless war should get in return for waging that war.

QUESTION: So just so I understand you properly, you're saying that Russia should end the war and then we can talk about other issues, if they are there. Is that what you're saying?

MR PRICE: That wasn't my point. My point was that this needs to come to a close. It can only come to a close through dialogue and diplomacy. So, there needs to be that diplomatic process. It is currently our assessment that Russia, at the present moment, is not inclined to engage in dialogue and diplomacy that could, in the near term, lead to a diminution of violence and an end to this war.

That is why we are using the tools at our disposal – including our security assistance, including our broader support for the Ukrainian Government and for the Ukrainian people, and the measures

that we have on the other side of the ledger to hold Russia to account – to change those dynamics, to change Moscow's calculus, to induce it to the negotiating table so that together with our Ukrainian partners they can determine how best to chart that path leading to a diminishment of the violence and ultimately to an end to this war.

Yes.

QUESTION: Yeah, can I follow up on a question that Humeysa had moved on. In terms of why administration says what it says, when it comes to the long-range weapons, Medvedev said all weekend that if any of our cities like get under attack Russian army forces will strike back, not only to Kyiv but also to quote/unquote "criminal decision-making centers." Do you – first, do you consider Moscow a criminal decision-making center, given the fact that Russia has been striking on Ukrainian cities for 100 days? And secondly, why don't you recognize Ukraine's right to strike back? Because so many analysts, military experts believe that Ukraine possessing those weapons actually will help them to combat Russia, not being defensive.

MR PRICE: So, I'm not aware that we've used the term criminal – sorry what was the term? "Criminal decision-making center"?

QUESTION: "Decision-making center."

MR PRICE: I'm not aware that we've used that specific term. But we have put forward our assessment that Russia's forces have committed war crimes – in other words, they have committed criminal acts on the battlefield, so there is at least some element there that we will continue to pursue justice and accountability for what not only Russia's forces have done but all those in the decision-making apparatus, those who are responsible for these crimes against humanity, the atrocities, the war crimes that have taken place.

Second, what has always been at stake here is Ukraine's right to exist. We heard a number of arguments that were entirely specious, leading up to Moscow's February 24th invasion. We heard about purported security concerns; we heard about concerns over what they stated to be NATO's aggressive nature, claiming a defensive alliance was anything but. In the end, what this came down to was we think President Putin's belief that Ukraine has no right to exist as a sovereign, independent, democratic, and free country. And so that is what our support, that is what the support of many of the world's countries, dozens of the world's countries, has been all about, is

making sure that Ukraine will continue to be and to exist and to be precisely what President Putin has sought to deny it, and that is its independence, its sovereignty, its democratic identity, and its prosperity.

So, our assistance to Ukraine has been focused in the area of self-defense. This has been a war of aggression on the part of one country, and that's Russia. This has been a war of self-defense on the part of our Ukrainian partners.

Yes, Michel.

QUESTION: Then how do you view Foreign Minister Lavrov visit to Saudi Arabia and Turkey? And what do you expect them to hear from your allies in the region?

MR PRICE: When it comes to his visit with our GCC partners, we have held extensive discussions with our GCC partners about the importance of international support for Ukraine, as it defends its sovereignty, as it defends its independence. We have conveyed to our partners – we've had many opportunities to discuss the need for the immediate withdrawal of Russian forces from Ukrainian territory and the cessation of Putin's war of choice in conversations with Foreign Minister Lavrov.

We understand that the GCC plans to push for an end to the conflict and the restoration of the flow of agricultural goods out of Ukraine to ease food prices and shortages and our Gulf partners understand the very acute, the very real implications, and far-reaching implications of President Putin's war against Ukraine. In many ways, some of our partners in the Gulf, some of our partners in North Africa, and far beyond have been on the frontlines or a frontline of this conflict, because they have been affected by the acute rise in food and commodity prices that is affecting their people and their governments as well.

Similarly, when it comes to foreign minister Lavrov's travel to Turkey, we understand and we certainly support the diplomatic efforts that our Turkish allies are forging in an effort to bring this war to a close, in the first instance diminish the violence, and also to find ways to facilitate the export of Ukrainian foodstuffs, including Ukrainian wheat. That is also something we support. I understand this visit is not going to be for several days, and we'll defer to our Turkish counterparts to comment on it.

Yes.

QUESTION: On Turkey, over the weekend Erdoğan said the military operation in Syria could happen suddenly. Does the U.S. have any indications that a Turkish operation is imminent? And what sort of assurances I guess are you offering Kurdish partners, if any?

MR PRICE: What kind of assurances are we offering —

QUESTION: Kurdish – our Kurdish partners in Syria.

MR PRICE: Well, we said this last week when this proposal was first raised, but we remain deeply concerned about discussions of potential increased military activity in northern Syria, and in particular, its impact on the civilian population there. We continue, as we've said before, to support the maintenance of current ceasefire lines. We would condemn any escalation that has the potential to jeopardize that. We believe it is crucial for all sides to maintain and respect ceasefire zones, principally to enhance stability in Syria and to work towards a political solution to the conflict. We believe that any effort to do otherwise could be counterproductive to our goals to bring about an end to the broader conflict in Syria, but also the tremendous progress that we've made together, including with our Kurdish partners, in the effort against ISIS that has achieved such important steps in recent years.

We do expect Turkey to live up to the October 2019 joint statement, including to halt offensive operations in northeastern Syria. And we recognize Turkey's legitimate security concerns on its border. But again, we are concerned that any new offensive would further undermine regional stability and would put at risk those hard-won gains in the campaign against ISIS.

Yes.

QUESTION: So Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi was unable to eke an omnibus deal with the Pacific Island countries during his recent visit. The subsequent statement that was released by China's embassy to the U.S. was absent a discussion of security cooperation between China and the Pacific Island countries he visited, including cooperation on data networks and cybersecurity that was reportedly part of China's original communique leaked before Foreign Minister Wang's trip. Do you have any reaction to these developments, both the lack of a deal and the Chinese embassy's subsequent statement?

MR PRICE: Well, we'll leave it to the parties involved to offer their assessment of what happened.

We, of course, have all seen the reports that have emanated from the region and with Pacific Island nations expressing concern about signing on to the PRC's proposal. We've made this point before, and the Secretary even made it in his speech on our approach to the People's Republic of China last week, and that is this: Each nation will make its own sovereign decisions. We together with our allies and partners, including those in the region, have made our concerns clear about the PRC's shadowy, unspecified deals with little regional consultations. We are committed to continue deepening our relationship with our Pacific Island partners and in the Indo-Pacific, including working together to deliver for our people.

I'd make one final point – and as this has been reported out, we've seen reports of regional and international media being blocked or encountering significant obstacles when attempting to cover the foreign minister visit to the region and the PRC so-called cooperation proposals. In Samoa, for example, the media were not allowed to question either the Samoan prime minister or Foreign Minister Wang during the visit. In Fiji, Fujian and Australian reporters covering the visit highlighted on social media a kerfuffle ahead of the meeting with the PIF secretary general, as PRC officials attempted unsuccessfully to block their entrance. In the Solomon Islands, there were calls to boycott the press conference due to the restrictions that the PRC imposed.

When we talk about these opaque, shadowy deals, I think you need only look at what many of your counterparts and colleagues around the world have reported about the PRC's efforts to obscure these very deals themselves, to – to even go so far as to prevent officials in the region from facing reporters in their own country, and of course, preventing the PRC foreign minister from having to answer to independent media who would ask the sorts of tough questions that he would surely get.

MR PRICE: Is kerfuffle – that's a technical diplomatic term, right?

MR PRICE: This was a term that was taken from a tweet.

Yes. Let me move around. Yes, Gitte.

QUESTION: Thanks, Ned. The IAEA's latest report on Iran is out and it's been leaked, and it doesn't look good for Iran. Talks about the – more violations and of course not clarifying things from the past for the IAEA. Last week at the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Rob Malley was asked if the U.S. was going to support a censure of Iran at next week's Board of Governors meeting. Has a decision – well, Rob said that the U.S. was consulting with the European allies. Has a decision been

made yet?

MR PRICE: I don't have a decision to announce today, but what I can say is this: we fully support the IAEA director general, the efforts of the IAEA as a whole to engage Iran on the need to provide the necessary cooperation in order to resolve the open safeguards issues in Iran. Just as the IAEA is concerned, we share those concerns. We have full faith and confidence in the IAEA. And as we previously said, Iran must fully cooperate with the IAEA without further delay.

Because this report is not public, we're not in a position to comment more fully. But we will continue to work closely with allies and partners and the Board of Governors of the IAEA to ensure that the board takes appropriate action in response to the director general's reporting. These unresolved safeguard issues, I think it is worth noting, relate to legal obligations under the MPT-required safeguards agreements with the IAEA. That of course is separate from Iran's JCPOA nuclear-related commitments. It remains our goal to see to it that Iran is once again bound by those JCPOA related nuclear commitments. And that is why we are proceeding with determining whether we can achieve a mutual return to compliance with the JCPOA.

QUESTION: And —

QUESTION: Ned, have you —

MR PRICE: Let met – let me let Gitte ask a follow-up.

QUESTION: And a question about inside of Iran. Since last week when a tall building collapsed – and, so far, about 40 corpses have been pulled out – demonstrations – people have been demonstrating and by now there are dozens of cities following suit with the people of Abadan. There's a number of slogans and chants that keep being repeated in different demonstrations every now and then, but one stands out that is being repeated again and was repeated yesterday, the translation of which is: our enemy is right here; they lie that it is America. Do you have any comments, any messages to the Iranian people who are chanting this slogan, that are saying their own establishment is lying to them and that America is not the Iranian people's enemy?

MR PRICE: We have spoken very clearly about the ongoing protests in Iran. We have also in the past spoken directly to the people of Iran. Last year when we first addressed what were then – what started as protests over water shortages and of course evolved from there, we sent a very clear

message to the Iranian people that remains true today. It was a message of the fact that we stand with you, we stand with the Iranian people who are trying to make their voices heard, and that we call on the Iranian Government to respect the right of the Iranian people to peaceful protest, and not to repress what are their fundamental demands.

This is a message that of course applies not only to the people of Iran – the right to peaceful assembly, the right to peaceful protest, the right to freedom of expression. These are universal rights that apply equally to the Iranian people as they do to any other people around the world. We will continue to stand for those rights with those people, voicing those rights who are doing so peacefully consistent with their rights.

QUESTION: Ned, sorry, the safeguard concerns that you mentioned just now, the – these are longstanding concerns. They're not new in this new report. If you support the BOG, as I like to call it, the Board of Governors taking responsible action to do this, why have you opposed it and even blocked it – action from the —

MR PRICE: The —

QUESTION: — Board of Governors in the past when these – when these shortcomings – these concerns have been raised?

MR PRICE: Matt, we have been very clear that we believe that the concerns of the IAEA have to be resolved and they have to be resolved swiftly. Again, we have full faith and confidence in the IAEA. We support the important mission that it is doing inside of Iran. The decisions of the Board of Governors, those are the decisions of the Board of Governors. We consult closely with our fellow members of the board, but again, we fully – we fully support the need to resolve these issues.

QUESTION: But Ned, last November there was a push to get the board to take up this question – these questions and concerns about safeguards, and you guys stopped it.

MR PRICE: Matt, I'm —

QUESTION: Why all of a sudden are you saying now it's time for the board to take action?

MR PRICE: We have always said —

QUESTION: Or are you going to oppose it again?

MR PRICE: We have always said that outstanding safeguards issue, including the ones that we've referenced today, need to be resolved. We are not under any illusions about the Iranian Government and what they have —

QUESTION: Okay. But why have you – why have you opposed them – the board dealing with it in the past?

MR PRICE: Matt, we have – we have found ways to —

QUESTION: Are you saying you haven't opposed it in the past?

MR PRICE: We – I am not speaking to behind – to closed-door conversations. We have done what we believe together with our IAEA partners to be most effective in confronting Iran's nuclear activities, including what is very clearly its past nuclear deception, just as we work with the IAEA to determine whether we can achieve a mutual return to compliance with the JCPOA.

QUESTION: But if it would – if it had been effective, presumably it wouldn't be an issue anymore.

MR PRICE: Matt, as you said yourself —

QUESTION: So, it hasn't been – it hasn't been —

MR PRICE: As you said yourself, these are issues that date back years.

QUESTION: No, I'm just talking about since last year. I mean, yes, they do go back years, but when you had a chance to take it up, when the board had a chance to take it up, you guys were opposed to it.

MR PRICE: And as you know, the board meets regularly, and we find ways to —

QUESTION: And so why – why did you oppose it in November and you're not opposing it now?

MR PRICE: I am not speaking to our posture or our stance towards any previous board of governors' resolutions or attempts. We work very closely as a partner with the IAEA to support its

activities and ultimately to see to it that its concerns regarding Iran's past nuclear activities are fully addressed.

I'll move around. Yes, in the back.

QUESTION: On Iran.

MR PRICE: Staying on Iran for one moment? Sure, Michel.

QUESTION: Iran foreign ministry spokesman has said today on Vienna talks that the reason for the current pause in the talks is because the U.S. has not responded to Iran and Europe's initiatives. Do you have any reaction to that?

MR PRICE: I saw that comment. I think anyone who speaks either to our European allies or to representatives of this government will of course hear otherwise. We and our European allies have made very clear we are prepared to immediately conclude and to implement the deal negotiated in Vienna for a mutual return to full implementation of the JCPOA, but it is ultimately up to Iran to decide to drop demands that go beyond the JCPOA, and to engage in good faith. That is a choice that only Tehran will be able to make.

Yes.

QUESTION: Ned, several weeks back you said, or you suggested, that the deal was within reach.

MR PRICE: The deal is absolutely still within reach. Of course.

QUESTION: So is it still the same? Is it far?

MR PRICE: It unfortunately, Said, has not changed. It is still within reach if Iran makes that political decision to engage in good faith and to focus on the JCPOA itself.

Yes.

QUESTION: Same topic, but asking about – specifically about that IAEA report that now indicates that there – Iran has enough enriched material for a nuclear weapon. Now, if that's the case, when is it time to either pull the plug on those negotiations or at the very least shake up the strategy? And

we did hear from Special Envoy Malley last week that being at the table doesn't mean that the administration is waiting, but given these indicators of progress, can the administration say it has a successful strategy or measure of curbing Iran's progress?

MR PRICE: The pursuit of a mutual return to compliance with the JCPOA will continue to be our policy goal, as long as it is in our national interest to do so. And that statement is a direct response to the first part of your question. Because yes, Iran's breakout time has been reduced to a point with which we are uncomfortable. Our allies and partners around the world are also uncomfortable with it. When the JCPOA was negotiated and ultimately implemented in January of 2016, that breakout time was 12 months. Since Iran has been in a position to distance itself from the strict limitations that the JCPOA imposed, that breakout time has dwindled to a matter of months, and more recently to a matter of weeks or potentially even less.

So, it is of course a concern for us. Going back to Said's question, a deal is within reach. A deal would be within reach, if Iran committed to negotiating in good faith and to focusing squarely on what should be the focus of discussions in Vienna, and that is the nuclear agreement itself. Were that to be the case, the breakout time that is now, to us at least, unacceptably short would be significantly lengthened. And that is our – that is our goal: to see to it that we put Iran's nuclear program back in a box; to see to it that some of the advancements that Iran has been able to make in recent years are reversed; and to ultimately, most importantly, ensure that Iran is once again verifiably and permanently prohibited from and unable to acquire or produce a nuclear weapon.

As long as we assess – as we do now, that the deal that is essentially on the table, the technical agreement that is essentially on the table, the – as long as we assess that its nonproliferation benefits outweigh the gains that Iran has been able to make in recent years in its nuclear program, we will continue to pursue that deal because pursuing it is ultimately in our national interest.

QUESTION: Can I change topics?

MR PRICE: Yes, sure.

QUESTION: On the Palestinian issue, Ned, *The Times of Israel* reported that you guys have shelved, once and for all, the reopening of the consulate in East Jerusalem and instead you're looking at maybe appointing Mr. Hady Amr as a special envoy with an office here and frequent trips. Can you comment on that?

MR PRICE: I don't have any personnel announcements to preview. What I can say is that at least part of your question or part of the premise you put forward is not accurate. We remain committed to opening a consulate in Jerusalem. We continue to believe it can be an important way for our country to engage with and provide support to the Palestinian people. We're continuing to discuss this with our Israeli and our Palestinian partners, and we'll continue to consult with members of Congress as well. Meanwhile, at this very moment, we have a dedicated team of colleagues working in Jerusalem, in our Palestinian Affairs Office, focused on engagement with and outreach to the Palestinian people.

QUESTION: So, what is the holdup? Why can't you reopen the consulate? What is holding you back?

MR PRICE: There are a number of steps that have to go into the reopening of any diplomatic facility. As you know, there are some, shall we say, unique sensitivities to this particular facility, but as I said before, we are —

QUESTION: Sorry to interrupt, but that facility was open for like 160 years, Ned.

MR PRICE: Understood.

QUESTION: It was there for a very, very long time.

MR PRICE: And we are working through the issue with our Palestinian and Israeli partners.

QUESTION: Ned, can I just make sure I understand one thing? At the very beginning, when you said you – we remain committed to opening or reopening a —

MR PRICE: Reopening.

QUESTION: Okay. So, it is still – what you're looking at is reopening. It's not opening a new consulate; it is reopening the former one?

MR PRICE: To Said's point – to Said's point, we previously had a facility there, yes.

QUESTION: I have a couple more questions. Over the weekend there was a lot of violence inflicted against the Palestinians, but – however you term it. Gantz, the Israeli defense minister, suggested

that they should outlaw far-right groups that rioted in Jerusalem. Do you support that premise?

MR PRICE: That's a decision for the Israeli Government to make. Just as we have a system of designations within our own countries when it – in our own country when it comes to foreign terrorist organizations and SDGTs and other authorities, that is for the Israeli Government to decide. What I will say is that we condemn incitement to violence and racism, in all of its forms. We remain concerned by the legacy of Kahane Chai and the continued use of its rhetoric among violent right-wing extremists. We —

QUESTION: But you – sorry. You took them off the terror list.

MR PRICE: They remain designated as an SGDT. That does not prevent us from continuing to hold accountable and to do what is necessary when it comes to members of that group. We urge all parties to maintain calm, to exercise restraint, and to refrain from actions that – and rhetoric that escalate tensions, including in Jerusalem.

QUESTION: And on the investigation of the killing of Shireen Abu Akleh, also *The Times of Israel* reporting that you guys will not conduct anything on your own, you urge the Israelis to do so. I know that my colleague, Ali Samoudi, sent you a letter today explaining what happened – he was hit along with Shireen Abu Akleh – and basically explaining – because he copied me – on what happened and why they don't trust the Israelis. I mean, this journalist has been hit something like – this particular journalist, Ali Samoudi, was hit like four or five or maybe six times. So, they don't really trust any investigation by the Israelis. What should happen, in your view, to really see the transparent investigations that you talk about so much is conducted properly and that those – the perpetrators will be brought to justice?

MR PRICE: Well, I can tell you what we have urged of our Israeli partners, and Secretary Blinken even over the weekend had another opportunity to reinforce this message with his counterpart, Foreign Minister Lapid. As he told Foreign Minister Lapid, we urge the Israeli Government to swiftly conclude their investigation into the killing of the Shireen Abu Akleh. We expect full accountability for those responsible for her killing, and to your question, Said, we have urged that the sides share their evidence with each other to facilitate that investigation. And we continue to call on all sides to maintain calm and to prevent further escalation.

QUESTION: What would you say to my colleague, Ali Samoudi, who sent you a letter today

explaining what happened? What would you say to assure him that he can continue to conduct his job as a journalist? I mean, he's been doing this for a very long time.

MR PRICE: Certainly appreciate his perspective and the time he took to offer his recollection and his thoughts on the incident that tragically took the life of Shireen Abu Akleh. We, whether it is —

QUESTION: And it injured him big time.

MR PRICE: I'm sorry? And, of course, injured him as well. We, as you've heard from us not only in recent days but going back to World Press Freedom Day earlier this month and throughout the course of this administration – we stand with journalists around the world who are doing their jobs in situations that sometimes are unfortunately dangerous, where they are often in a position of putting themselves in dangerous situations to do a job, to fulfill a task that is indispensable. And the role of journalists, like him, the role of journalists around the world, is in fact an indispensable role.

We will continue with our engagement with other governments, whether they are close friends, whether they are counterparts across the spectrum, to reinforce what should be the inviolable principle of media freedom and the idea that journalists and their ability to do their jobs must not be impeded in any way or in any form.

Humeyra.

QUESTION: Ned, do you still – does the United States still believe that the issues between Finland, Sweden, and Turkey will be resolved swiftly after the talks between the three of them last week didn't particularly yield to a lot of progress?

MR PRICE: We have had a number of discussions, including last week, when the Secretary had an opportunity to meet his Finnish counterpart. As you know, NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg will be here tomorrow. Presumably, this will also be a topic of that bilateral engagement.

Nothing has changed our assessment that – or nothing has shifted our confidence in the idea that NATO accession for Finland* – excuse me – Finland and Sweden has broad support within the NATO Alliance and that it can be fulfilled swiftly.

QUESTION: And by swiftly, do you mean – is it U.S. preference that this would be resolved before

the NATO summit in end June?

MR PRICE: I'm not going to put a timeframe on it. Of course, swiftly means swiftly. We want to see these two applicants in the NATO Alliance just as soon as that process can be managed.

QUESTION: And you have made a point of saying – you and others in the administration have made a point of saying this is not a bilateral issue with – between the United States and Turkey, but if this keeps dragging on for many months and beyond the summit, would the U.S. be more willing to get more involved? And that is not a hypothetical, because it is very likely to happen.

MR PRICE: Well, so this is not a bilateral issue. This is an issue, at this moment, between Turkey and Finland and Sweden and, of course, senior NATO officials, including the Secretary General also have a role to play in it. Our point is that we will continue to have consultations with our Turkish partners, of course with our Swedish and Finnish partners as well —

QUESTION: But I guess what I'm trying to say – yeah, you guys have said and Jake Sullivan also said like we're willing to – we're ready to do whatever is necessary to facilitate this. So what is that?

MR PRICE: We will continue to have consultations with our NATO counterparts, with our allies, with our ally Turkey, with our partners, Finland and Sweden, who will, we think, soon be considered allies as well. So we will continue to engage in that dialogue, but ultimately this is not an issue between the United States and Turkey; this is an issue between those three countries.

QUESTION: If you would indulge me with one more question, going back on the Palestine issue, last Thursday 62 congressman and 19 senators sent a letter to Secretary Blinken demanding or asking that he intervene on behalf of the demolition of Masafer Yatta. You have any reaction to that?

MR PRICE: Our reaction to that is what our message has consistently been. We continue to urge all sides to avoid steps that have the potential to inflame tensions, that have the potential to set back the cause of a two-state solution.

Yes.

QUESTION: Ned, can I get your reaction to EU's partial oil ban? Was it enough, in your opinion, less than enough, more than enough? And separately, Gazprom has decided to halt gas deliveries to two

more countries this week, Denmark and Netherlands, which I think will hit the number five, so we're at Poland, Bulgaria, and Finland that were cut off previously. Your reaction to that as well? And I have another —

MR PRICE: Well —

QUESTION: — question on energy afterwards.

MR PRICE: Well, the two parts of your question are actually very related. It is incumbent upon countries around the world to lessen their dependent on Russian energy, precisely so that Moscow can no longer be in a position to attempt to weaponize energy flows the way it has sought to do not only with Ukraine but with a number of other European countries as well. To the announcement from the EU within recent hours, that is part and parcel of that, and for that reason we welcome the EU's proposed ban on Russian oil, and of course the EU would need to speak to any details.

As you know, we have already taken strong action in that regard. President Biden put forward an executive order to ban the import of Russian oil, gas, LNG, and coal. That will further and has further deprived President Putin of the economic resources he would otherwise need to prosecute this war in Ukraine. On May 8th, earlier this month, the entire G7 committed to phasing out or banning the import of Russian oil. And we know that there is broad support, as we saw again today from the EU, among our allies and partners for cutting off the strength of Russia's war machine, and that is Russia's energy market. We are united in our purpose to keep the pressure on President Putin and all of those who are responsible for waging this war. And we applaud the steps by our European allies and partners to reduce their reliance on Russian oil and natural gas by diversifying their sources of energy and reducing consumption, in line with our shared climate goals.

As you know, there is a near-term component to this, and the EU took an important step on that near-term path, but then there's also a longer-term path that has more to do – less to do with the day-to-day and more to do with trends over time and the broader need to lessen our reliance on Russian energy and fossil fuels more broadly, and that's something that a joint US-EU task force is outlining in terms of specific steps.

Yes.

QUESTION: Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova are now at the crossroads on the path toward a

Western choice. You know that all three countries are awaiting the EU decision on the official candidate status. Your position as our key strategic partner is extremely important here. How likely do you believe these three countries are to reach this major milestone at this juncture?

MR PRICE: Well, these are questions for those three countries and for the EU, but I think you know in the case of all three of those countries, the United States – as a partner, as a strategic partner as it were, strongly supports the European aspirations, the European ambitions of these three countries. We have stood with them as they have gone down that path from independence to where they are now; and we will continue to stand by them as they continue down that path.

Yes, please.

QUESTION: Yesterday, five to six rockets landed on – they were targeted at Ayn al-Asad base in Iraq, and they landed near U.S. troops where they are stationed. Do you have a reaction to that, or do you know who is behind it? And I have two more questions if that's okay.

MR PRICE: Well, I would refer you to the Government of Iraq and to the Department of Defense for details, but I can confirm that an attack took place last night against an Iraqi base that houses international coalition advisors. We understand that there was no damage, nor were there any casualties. But I'd need to refer you to the Government of Iraq for more details.

QUESTION: And then on the – Iraq's political impasse, there is a new initiative by the IKR president to get the parties to some sort of agreement on the candidacy for the – Iraq's presidency. Is that something that the U.S. supports, and how can the U.S. help the process there?

MR PRICE: We will – I will let you know if we have anything to say on that specific proposal. But we do believe it's important to move forward with the process so that the needs and the aspirations of the Iraqi people can be fulfilled just as quickly and effectively as possible.

QUESTION: And then last one on Baghdad and Erbil relations. What's the department's view on Baghdad's attempts to limit Kurdistan Region's oil sales and limiting Kurdistan Region's authorities in managing its own energy sector?

MR PRICE: We have urged Baghdad and Erbil, the Iraqi Government, and our Kurdish partners to work together constructively to resolve any differences, and that remains the case here.

Yes.

QUESTION: On Lebanon, Ned, do you have any comment on the re-election of the speaker of the house for the seventh time?

MR PRICE: I don't have a specific comment beyond what we said last week, and that is the process of government formation needs to continue so that there is a durable, effective government in place that can enact the necessary reforms to unlock what the Lebanese people have been missing for far too long. In some ways, that is about resources with the IMF loan guarantees that have been discussed, but this is also about providing the Lebanese people with a durable, representative government that can fulfill their humanitarian needs that have gone unmet for far too long. So, that is a process we continue to support. It is a process that needs to move swiftly so that we can make progress, so that Lebanon can make progress on that.

Yes.

QUESTION: I wanted to go back to what you said at the very top about the absorption – possible absorption of Kherson. I think early May, Ambassador Carpenter was here warning about that and – but then he said that this sham referendum, or the attempt to annex Donbas into Russia, would happen in mid-May. Do you have any indications why that hasn't happened yet?

And also, separately, I wanted to ask about – there was – it has been reported in the Polish press that there is an agreement to make U.S. forces' presence there permanent ahead of the NATO summit. Do you have any comment on that?

MR PRICE: I'm sorry, I missed – U.S. forces where?

QUESTION: In Poland.

MR PRICE: In Poland.

QUESTION: Yeah.

MR PRICE: So, when it comes to Kherson, you're right; we have been concerned for some time about the possibility of a sham referendum conducted in Kherson. The message we reiterated

today is the fact that this is a well-worn part of the Russian Government's playbook. We are not saying that it definitively will hold a referendum there. There are other options that could be under consideration, including, as I said before, to create a so-called Kherson people's republic despite lacking any legitimacy or popular mandate to do so.

I can't speak to why the Russians have or have not taken certain steps beyond making the point that we have noted that we have – when we have made public parts of our understanding of Russia's playbook previously, they have been forced to adapt, and in some cases they have changed their plans as a result of the United States and our partners and allies around the world shining a spotlight on our concerns. Whether that happened here, I couldn't say, but what I can say is we do remain concerned that the Russian Government will take certain steps – whether it's a referendum, whether it's the declaration of a so-called people's republic, whether it is another means by which to impose the Kremlin's will on the people of the Kherson region. That continues to be a concern of ours.

Final question?

QUESTION: I have one more.

QUESTION: The second question?

MR PRICE: Oh, the —

QUESTION: Sorry, unrelated.

MR PRICE: Final – yes, second question?

QUESTION: I asked about the reports that —

MR PRICE: Oh, on Poland, yes.

QUESTION: Yeah.

MR PRICE: I don't have any announcements. Those are decisions that we make on a national level and when it comes to the basing of NATO forces together as a NATO Alliance.

Yes.

QUESTION: So, about ten days – or maybe it was a little longer than that ago – *The New York Times* ran a very, very lengthy story about Haiti, and basically the misery they've been going through. Anyway, I'm not going to ask you to get into the historical background going back to the 1700s about this, but in – part of that story made – there were allegations that the United States had essentially conspired with France to oust Aristide, in part because he was demanding reparations for the French. This was under the Bush administration, obviously, in 2004.

What do you make of those allegations?

MR PRICE: I would need to go back on that. Obviously, this is quite dated. But what I can say now is that —

QUESTION: Which is quite dated, the story or 2004?

MR PRICE: No, the 2004 element of a —

QUESTION: It's not that long ago.

MR PRICE: Well, I —

QUESTION: I mean, you might have been in grade school, but some of us were actually – (laughter) – working.

MR PRICE: I – we will get back to you if we have anything to say on that particular. historical allegation. But what I can say more recently is that since President Moïse's assassination, we've continuously called on all Haitian stakeholders to reach agreement on a unified way forward towards free and fair elections when those conditions permit. And we continue to work with all current Haitian officials, including Prime Minister Henry, to address Haiti's most critical needs, including security, post-disaster reconstruction and recovery, and COVID-19 vaccinations.

QUESTION: All right. Well, I would appreciate it if there could be – if someone could get an answer about whether or not you agree or disagree with the assertion, the allegation – including from a former French ambassador to Haiti – that this is, in fact, was the case – that you guys, that the Bush

administration worked with the French to get rid of Aristide in part because he was demanding those reparations. Thank you.

MR PRICE: We will let you – we will let you know.

Thank you all very much.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: Thanks.

(The briefing was concluded at 3:22 p.m.)

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[Department Press Briefing – May 25, 2022](#)

MR PRICE: Good afternoon, everyone.

QUESTION: Good afternoon.

MR PRICE: Before I get to your questions, I would like to take just a moment to highlight an initiative that illustrates the U.S. commitment to pursuing accountability for war crimes and other atrocities committed by members of Russia's forces in Ukraine, using every tool we have available.

Earlier today, with our European and UK partners, we announced the launch of the Atrocity Crimes Advisory Group for Ukraine, or the ACA.

This multilateral initiative directly supports ongoing efforts by the war crimes units of the Office of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine, the OPG, to document, preserve, analyze evidence of war crimes and other atrocities committed in Ukraine, with a view to criminal prosecutions.

As the Secretary said in a statement earlier today, evidence continues to mount of war crimes and other atrocities committed by members of Russia's forces in Ukraine. In addition to continued bombardments and missile strikes hitting densely populated areas, causing thousands of civilian deaths, we continue to see credible reports of violence of a different order: unarmed civilians shot in the back; individuals killed execution-style with their hands bound; bodies showing signs of torture; and horrific accounts of sexual violence against women and girls.

The establishment of this multilateral accountability effort, therefore, comes at a critical time. The ACA will provide strategic advice and operational assistance to the war crimes unit of the OPG, the legally constituted authority responsible for prosecuting war crimes and other atrocities in Ukraine. The ACA will reinforce and help coordinate existing U.S., EU, and UK efforts to support justice and accountability for atrocity crimes. It will demonstrate our international solidarity with Ukraine as it seeks to hold Russia accountable.

Although the United States and our partners are supporting a range of international efforts to pursue accountability for atrocities, the OPG will play a crucial role in ensuring that those responsible for war crimes and other atrocities are held accountable at the domestic level. The ACA is an essential element of the United States commitment to seeing that those responsible for such crimes are held to account.

With that, happy to take your questions. Shaun.

QUESTION: Can I follow up on Ukraine?

MR PRICE: Sure.

QUESTION: The – Ukraine has voiced unease. Russia has said it's going to make it easier for people in parts of Ukraine that are under Russian control to obtain Russian citizenship. Does the United States have a view on that?

MR PRICE: We certainly have a view on some of the horrific tactics that the Russian Federation has employed in parts of Ukraine, eastern Ukraine, where its forces are present. We have seen Russian forces forcibly remove individuals from occupied territory. We have seen Russia's forces transport Ukrainians to the so-called filtration camps. We have seen Russia's forces attempt through other ways to subjugate, otherwise subdue the Ukrainian people in these areas.

So to the extent that this is an effort that is only loosely disguised as an element of Russia's attempt to subjugate the people of Ukraine, to impose their will by force, that is something that we would forcefully reject. It is not entirely unlike Russia's attempts to manufacture these fake referenda, referenda that are designed to offer the veneer of legitimacy to Russian rule over parts of what is sovereign Ukrainian territory; referenda where Russian-backed officials tend to somehow accrue 90-plus, 99 percent of the vote. It is a tactic that Russia's forces, the Russian Federation have used in different contexts before – in Crimea in 2014, in Chechnya, more recently our concerns that we voiced with Russia's aggression against Ukraine in this phase, including in places like Kherson.

QUESTION: Ned, a follow-up. Shooting people in the back and things like this, tied behind – their hands – is that a new thing, or is that the Bucha massacre? Are you looking into old stuff, or all lumped together?

MR PRICE: The reference that the Secretary made in his statement today and the reference I made at the top of course includes Bucha. But we have seen reports of these types of summary executions in places well beyond Bucha. As the Secretary speaks to this, as he has talked about it, he has described a receding tide, a receding tide of brutality. And when Russia's forces leave a city, a town, a place like Bucha, in the coming days a place like Mariupol, what we have found in its wake are additional reports of these types of atrocities.

QUESTION: Okay. And the ACA, is it going to be something akin or parallel to the ICC, for instance? How will it conduct its work?

MR PRICE: So what the ACA does is bring together multinational experts to provide strategic advice, operational assistance, and capacity building, including technical capacity building in areas such as crime scene and forensic investigations; the drafting of indictments; the collection, preservation of evidence; operational analysis; the investigation of conflict-related violence, including sexual violence; and cooperation with international and national accountability mechanisms.

It specifically includes two key elements. The first is an advisory group to the OPG, the Office of the Prosecutor General, made up of experienced war crimes prosecutors, investigators, and other specialists, based in the region to provide expertise, mentoring, advice, and operational support to the OPG. And the second component is something known as MJTs, or Mobile Justice Teams, composed of both international and Ukrainian experts. These experts will be deployed at the request of the OPG to increase the capacity of the war crimes unit and regional prosecutors to assist the investigation on the ground.

We've said this before, but the reason we are focusing at least in the first instance our efforts on the Office of the Prosecutor General and her war crimes unit is precisely because they have the capacity, they have the determination, and importantly they have the jurisdiction to bring these cases to trial, including criminal prosecutions, one of which we have already seen result in a guilty plea.

Simon.

QUESTION: It is U.S. Government officials who will be working in those Mobile Justice Teams?

MR PRICE: Right now these are non-official American experts, individual who bring expertise, knowledge, and know-how, as well as experience in all of these areas.

QUESTION: So they – so those are civilians, but they will travel into Ukraine sort of despite the current warnings of —

MR PRICE: As part of the Mobile Justice Teams, there will be international experts who will be on the ground at the disposal of the Ukrainian prosecutor general and her team whose expertise then can be deployed as appropriate.

Yes.

QUESTION: Hold on —

QUESTION: Will the ACA – will the ACA be able to advise to investigate Putin?

MR PRICE: The ACA is focused on war crimes and potential war crimes in Ukraine, so they will be looking at reports, reports that may well entail much more than reports and could constitute evidence of war crimes. Now, of course, in the first instance they are going to look to criminally prosecute those who are in Ukraine, as is the case now with the Russian soldier who has recently undergone trial. But we have made the point clear that under international humanitarian law it's not only the individual that pulls the trigger or conducts the war crime on the ground, but it is anyone in the chain of command who was witting and part of a war crime. And so that's something that more broadly we will look to as well.

QUESTION: Ned, I'm sorry, I missed the top. I'm beginning to think there might be something of a conspiracy with no two-minute warning, or at least I didn't hear if there was one, so anyway, I apologize.

MR PRICE: I will just – I will make the point, Matt, that everyone else was here on time.

QUESTION: Okay. Well, I apologize for missing the very top, and I hope that you're prepared to answer this question. And I want to preface it by saying I am not suggesting that it is a waste of time or money to investigate war crimes allegations at all, wherever they take place, whether it's in Burma, whether it's in Iraq, whether it's in Afghanistan, whether it's in the West Bank, whether it is in Ukraine or Syria. I – that's fine.

But since the President – President Biden – first said that he believed war crimes were being committed by Russia in Ukraine, there have been, by my counting – correct me if I'm wrong – at least three different initiatives that the United States has either begun, launched, or taken part of to investigate war crimes in – allegations in Ukraine. This latest one says in the joint statement – it says it seeks to streamline coordination and communications efforts to ensure best practices, and most critically, avoid duplication of efforts.

Now, less or just a week ago – like eight days ago – you guys announced that there was this – the creation with \$6 million of this new conflict observatory, which is basically going to do the same thing as what this ACA thing is, unless you can tell me that I'm wrong and that it doesn't.

MR PRICE: I can —

QUESTION: But you had already, when – but you – even before then, after the President’s comments, when the Secretary made his announcement that he had concluded that war crimes were being committed, you guys had also pledged additional funds to NGO investigators who were going to be in the region – maybe not necessarily in Ukraine, but traveling in and collecting evidence and sharing it with the ICC and others.

So this latest thing, which – I’m sure that there’s – it’s being done with good intentions, but how is it not duplicating efforts that you guys have – are already spending millions of dollars on?

MR PRICE: If your point, Matt, is that we are heavily —

QUESTION: I don’t have a point, I just want to know how this is not duplicative of the other three – two – at least two, and maybe three, initiatives that you guys are already doing.

MR PRICE: Well, the premise of your point or perhaps your question seems to be that we’re heavily invested in this. We absolutely are. We are committed to working with the Ukrainian prosecutor general and her team to see to it that we can do everything we can to be helpful in the effort to bring to justice those who are responsible for war crimes. You raised a few different mechanisms; let me see if I can offer some clarity on that.

You are correct that we did launch something called the Observatory in recent weeks. That is —

QUESTION: It was last week.

MR PRICE: That is separate and distinct from this new mechanism. The Observatory is a consortium working with, by the way, some of the same partners who are involved in this, but for a very different purpose. It is not to provide the sort of technical expertise, technical analysis, the writing of indictments, the forensics, the investigation on the ground of potential war crimes. The Observatory is a hub to collect open-source potential evidence pointing to war crimes, not only for authorities in various jurisdictions but for the public, including to continue to shine a spotlight on what are clearly atrocities and apparent war crimes that are ongoing in Ukraine.

This, as I alluded to a moment ago, is quite separate. There is, as I said, two elements to this. There

is an advisory group that is made up of war crimes prosecutors, investigators, other specialists to provide expertise, mentoring, advice, operational support, the kind of tactical operational support that you're not going to see from the Observatory – the writing of an indictment, for example, the forensics investigation. And then, of course, the Observatory does a service by publishing open-source information; but what the ACA does is it helps our Ukrainian partners actually collect that evidence actually on the ground, with Mobile Justice Teams composed of international and Ukrainian experts to be deployed to augment the capacity of the Ukrainian prosecutor general.

You are also right that we have funded various operational partners, again, some of whom are – have been recipients of that funding that we talked about and who are involved in both the Observatory and the ACA. So when we talk about deconfliction and the avoidance of duplication, that is absolutely a goal of the ACA.

QUESTION: Yeah, but it involves the —

MR PRICE: That's part of the reason why we're working with the UK and the EU, bringing to bear this technical expertise, this technical know-how, and this technical capacity, so that together with some of our closest partners we can help direct it precisely where the Ukrainian prosecutor general and her team need it.

QUESTION: All right. Well, maybe we can get someone in here to explain to me exactly how these aren't duplicative, because I don't get it in what you – I don't think your response has cleared it up. Maybe it has for others, but not for me. So perhaps we could have a conversation with someone who's actually directly involved.

So anyway, how much is this ACA going to cost?

MR PRICE: This is something that we've just launched today. We don't have specific figures to release, but we're working with Congress to allocate additional assistance funds that will continue to support the important work that's being undertaken.

QUESTION: And then the last one on this is that you have a pretty senior – I don't know if this was at the top that I missed, but you have some senior officials who are in The Hague today or finishing their trip today. Did you get into that?

MR PRICE: We have not.

QUESTION: Oh. Is that not part of this?

MR PRICE: It is separate.

QUESTION: Well, they seemed to talk about the —

MR PRICE: Well, of course —

QUESTION: I mean, the statement about their visit says that they were talking about the European Democratic Resilience Initiative, EDRI, which is the same thing that —

MR PRICE: But the visit —

QUESTION: — you guys are drawing on for this ACA.

MR PRICE: The visit is not linked to the launch precisely of the ACA.

QUESTION: Okay, all right. So does it have anything to do with more cooperation or increasing cooperation with the ICC and the — the visit I mean.

MR PRICE: The visit has to do, again, with our support for the announcement, the fact that we welcomed the announcement by the ICC prosecutor general looking into the situation in Ukraine. Again, we have said that we are willing to assist the efforts of all of those mechanisms that have the potential to bring to justice, to hold accountable, those who are responsible for war crimes in Ukraine.

In the first instance, as I just said at some length, we are focused on the Ukrainian prosecutor general and her team, precisely because they have the determination, the know-how, and importantly, the jurisdiction to do just that, which they've already proven in at least one case. But there's the Moscow mechanism, there's a commission of inquiry through the Human Rights Council that we helped to establish, and there's the ICC, whose announcement we did welcome when it came about.

QUESTION: So just to put a fine point on it, they didn't go there to say we're going to do more to

help you, we're just going to continue what we've already been doing; is that correct?

MR PRICE: I don't have conversations to read out. Of course, the visit is ongoing. But we have said that we are prepared to work with the appropriate mechanisms in the pursuit of justice in Ukraine.

Nazira.

QUESTION: To follow on the ACA a little more.

MR PRICE: Sure.

QUESTION: Will the ACA be involved in investigating of war crimes elsewhere, or is it only distinctly about Ukraine?

MR PRICE: This is focused on Ukraine.

QUESTION: Okay. Thank you.

MR PRICE: Nazira?

QUESTION: Thank you, Mr. Price. As you know, the Taliban recent decision ordered all woman during the programming in TV to use mask. It's too difficult. I don't know United States has some reaction to them and what their expectation, what they want from the United States or international community because it's really tough decision. Every day they create a new regulation for the woman.

Number two, can you update me about refugee number, how many came since August 15, and how many expected to come to the United States, please? Thank you.

MR PRICE: Thank you for that. You raise the most recent set of restrictions, and it's important that we dwell on the fact that it's only the most recent because these restrictions do come in the context of a number of restrictions that the Taliban has imposed on women and girls inside of Afghanistan, including the continuing ban on girls' secondary access to – access to secondary education and work, restrictions on freedom of movement, and the targeting of peaceful protestors.

We have said – I think I've said this to you – that the Taliban's policies towards women and girls, they

are an affront to human rights; they will continue to negatively impact the relationship that the Taliban has and potentially hopes to have not only with the United States but with the rest of the world. We are discussing this with our – with other countries, with our allies and partners. You may have seen the joint statements that came out of the G7, also the joint press statement out of the UN Security Council. The legitimacy, the support the Taliban seeks from the international community, it depends on their conduct, including – and centrally – their respect for the rights of women.

When it comes to the public and private commitments that the Taliban have made. They have made a number of them, including their counterterrorism commitments, including their pledge to respect and to uphold the human rights of women, girls, Afghanistan's minorities, including access – the freedom of access, freedom of travel for those who wish to leave Afghanistan, and when it comes to ISIS-K and al-Qaida.

Of course, the Taliban has not been living up to the commitment it has made in the realm of human rights, in the realm of what it has pledged to the women and girls of Afghanistan. It is not just the United States that has taken note, but it is a number of countries around the world, including multilateral organizations, including the UN, that have also taken note. And of course that will have implications for the world's relationship with the Taliban going forward.

QUESTION: A number, too? How many refugee expected to come to the United —

MR PRICE: I don't have an updated refugee figure to offer, but we can get back to you on that.

QUESTION: Okay. Thank you.

MR PRICE: Yes.

QUESTION: Thank you, Ned. On North Korea and the PRC, so could you give us your reaction to the ballistic missile test yesterday? Is there any indication of another nuclear test? And on the PRC, could you help us understand what would be the main focus of the Secretary's policy speech tomorrow?

MR PRICE: So on the missile launches that we've seen overnight, we condemn the DPRK's multiple ballistic missile launches that took place last night Eastern Time. These launches are a violation of multiple UN Security Council resolutions and they are a threat to the region, a threat to its peace

and stability. We call on the DPRK to refrain from further provocation and to engage in sustained dialogue.

Our commitment to the defense of the ROK and to Japan is ironclad. That was a message that Secretary Blinken delivered to his Japanese and South Korean counterparts shortly after the most recent launches last night. Secretary Austin also spoke to his counterparts. This of course came on the heels of President Biden's meeting with his Japanese and ROK counterparts in Tokyo and South Korea. It is a testament, we think, to the strength of our alliances with the ROK and Japan that we had this close coordination at multiple levels and multiple principals in the immediate aftermath of the launches of these ballistic missiles. In the Secretary's call last night – calls last night, all three officials strongly condemned the DPRK's ballistic missile launches as a clear violation of multiple UN Security Council resolutions. The Secretary noted our commitment to the defense of our treaty allies and affirmed the importance of continued close trilateral cooperation on the threat that is posed by the DPRK and towards the objective of the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

We know that the DPRK's ongoing provocations pose a threat to the region, pose a threat to all of us. And it's incumbent on the international community to join us in condemning the DPRK's flagrant and repeated violations of these multiple UN Security Council resolutions and to uphold their obligations under all relevant UN Security Council resolutions.

When it comes to the Secretary's speech tomorrow, I of course want to allow the Secretary to deliver that speech before we go too far into detail, but he will deliver remarks at the Asia – or at the George Washington University in a speech that is being hosted by the Asia Society. He will outline our approach to the People's Republic of China. I think you will hear from the Secretary the fact that this relationship is one that will and has the potential to contour the international landscape. The next 10 years will in many ways be the decisive decade in the competition between the United States and China. That's why even as we're focused together with our allies and partners on Russia's aggression in Ukraine, we've continued our focus on the long-term challenge of the PRC. And that's what the Secretary will detail tomorrow, how we're going to and how we have pursued that.

Will.

QUESTION: Thank you. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Rudenko said today that he would support helping Ukrainian grain and other grain get out of the Black Sea today in exchange for the lifting of

sanctions on Russian exports and financial industry. So I'm wondering if the U.S. supports that given that, as many of us thought, the negotiations that the UN was leading were looking for some sort of sanctions carveout or sanctions exemption on fertilizers and food.

MR PRICE: Well, first and foremost, we continue our close cooperation with our Ukrainian partners. What we said in the lead-up to the invasion is true now: nothing about Ukraine without Ukraine.

You have heard from Russian officials a series of lies, a series of disinformation, regarding the issue of food security and the global food supply. Despite those claims, U.S. sanctions are not causing disruptions to Russia's agricultural exports. The fact is that U.S. sanctions were specifically designed to allow for the export of agricultural commodities and fertilizer from Russia.

So we certainly won't lift our sanctions in response to empty promises, and we've heard empty promises before from the Russian Federation. I think we have – all have good reason to be skeptical when we hear various pledges and offers from Russia. This was the same country, of course, that for months maintained that it had no intention of invading its neighbor and taking on this brutal war.

So we'll continue to coordinate closely with our allies and partners on this matter, just as we have since Russia initiated its unjustified and appalling further invasion of Ukraine. It is Russia that continues to destabilize global food markets through its war, through its self-imposed export restrictions, which have raised the cost of food around the globe.

You heard from the Secretary this message last week, but we find it appalling that Russia would seek to weaponize food and energy to try to bring the world to heel. We have never sanctioned food. We have never sanctioned agricultural goods from Russia. Unlike Russia, we have no interest in weaponizing food against the needy. Our nonfood sanctions will remain in place until Putin stops this brutal war against Ukraine's sovereignty. And we know that the quickest solution to the rising commodity prices, the rising food prices that have had implications around the world, is for the Russians to cease this brutal war, for Russia to stop blockading Ukraine's ports, for Russia to stop targeting grain silos, to stop targeting grain ships, and to bring this violence to a close.

So we are working along multiple lines of effort together with our allies and partners. You heard about a number of those from the Secretary last week in his remarks at the ministerial in the UN Security Council. But the bottom line is that there is one country that is fully capable of putting an

end to this crisis, and that's Russia.

Yes.

QUESTION: *The New York Times* today said the Biden administration has accelerated its efforts to reshape Taiwan's defense systems and that U.S. officials are taking lessons learned from arming Ukraine. Could you describe what some of those lessons are and how they relate to arming Taiwan?

MR PRICE: Well, you've heard us talk about the Taiwan Relations Act, and the Taiwan Relations Act stipulates that we have an obligation to make available to Taiwan defense articles and services necessary to enable it to maintain a sufficient self-defense capability. Within recent years, the United States has notified Congress of over \$18 billion in arms sales to Taiwan.

We have encouraged the – our partners on Taiwan to push forward with an asymmetric strategy, knowing that an asymmetric strategy, an asymmetric model has – will be the most effective for them should it be necessary. We are in regular, routine conversations with them about the best systems, the best capabilities to pursue that strategy, and we will continue to consult with Congress as we move forward with other potential sales.

Yes, Said.

QUESTION: Thank you. On the Palestinian issue?

MR PRICE: Sure.

QUESTION: Okay. Not only major American news organizations such as AP and CNN have basically laid out almost a clear – clear evidence that the Israelis were behind the killing of Shireen Abu Akleh, but also major Europeans like France 24, DPI, many others, and so on. My question to you – I know you want transparent and thorough investigation and so on, and I'm sure you guys probably have the best investigative assets anywhere in the world. Will the United States pursue its own investigative to determine whether these reports by respectable news agencies and companies and so on are authentic or right on target?

MR PRICE: Said, we have made clear to both Israeli and Palestinian authorities that we expect the investigations to be transparent and impartial – a full, thorough accounting into the circumstances

of the killing of Shireen Abu Akleh. We do expect full accountability for those responsible for her killing. Again, we are not going to prejudge that investigation. Both investigations are ongoing. We have conveyed to our partners that we do expect to be updated on the status of their investigations, but in the end, we want to see accountability.

QUESTION: Should there be a time limit on the investigation? Because, I mean, Israel's record is abysmal in this regard. They can drag on and on and on. Should there be, like, a time limit – say, we expect that you guys will be done with what you are doing by such and such date?

MR PRICE: We're not going to impose a specific deadline, but these investigations need to be conducted, need to be concluded as rapidly as is possible.

QUESTION: Because the —

QUESTION: Sorry, sorry, just – yesterday I asked you if you were aware of an offer, at least, from the Israelis to – for the U.S. to participate in or to be an observer in their investigation, and you said you weren't aware of that. Is that still the case?

MR PRICE: That's still accurate, yes.

QUESTION: Okay. And then —

MR PRICE: Said, did you have another question?

QUESTION: Well, I have another one on this too, and that is the fact that you left out the word "immediate" in what you talked about, what you —

MR PRICE: Well, the investigations are ongoing.

QUESTION: You said – yeah, but yesterday you said you want an immediate – oh, so "immediate" meant the start of the investigation?

MR PRICE: It means —

QUESTION: Like immediately after the incident happened?

MR PRICE: It means the —

QUESTION: It doesn't mean immediate like you want it done as – what —

MR PRICE: Well, of course, as I just said to Said, we want to see the investigations concluded as quickly as is possible.

QUESTION: Well, why did it drop out? Why did "immediate" drop out of the talking point today? Or did you just skip over it by —

MR PRICE: There has been no change in our policy.

Yes, Said.

QUESTION: Yeah, just a couple more on Gaza. Yesterday marked the 15th anniversary of the blockade on Gaza, and there is a very tight or actually potentially disastrous situation in terms of grain and so on, all factories have stopped and so on. Isn't it time to really lift the blockade on Gaza? It's layer after layer of blockades – the Israelis, the Egyptians, you. I mean, everybody is blockading Gaza. Don't you think that the time has come to lift these blockades?

MR PRICE: Said, we have made clear that obviously we have concern for the humanitarian plight of the Palestinian people in Gaza. It's precisely why we have taken a series of steps to provide humanitarian assistance to those in need.

Yes, Shaun.

QUESTION: Something you don't usually address from the podium, but the situation in your home state, the tragedy in Texas with the shooting. As it relates to foreign affairs, your counterpart in Beijing today mentioned it and said that it's unacceptable that the U.S. hasn't addressed gun violence, said it's hypocritical for the U.S. to be raising human rights with China when this goes on. Do you have any response to that? Do you think it's fair game for Beijing to raise this?

MR PRICE: I don't have a direct response to it. Perhaps I can get to it in a roundabout way. The toll of watching this, even for those of us who are enmeshed day to day in foreign policy, has been a real punch to the gut, and it's been a punch that has landed on what is in many ways a bruise that

hasn't healed from just the other day, what we saw in Buffalo. It is a toll that – it's a devastating human toll, but of course, it has implications for our work here at the department as well.

And as I've thought about it, I've – couldn't help but focus on President Biden's conception of American leadership. He's made the point that it is not the example of our power, it's the power of example that at our best we use to lead. We do so when we are at our best. The fact is that what happens in this country is magnified on the world stage, and countries around the world, people around the world are going to fixate on what transpires here, oftentimes out of envy, but again, that's when we're at our best. And that's what we want. We've been a city on a hill, the last best hope, a shining beacon to the world, and again, when we're at our best, that example is one that countries around the world would seek to emulate.

But the opposite is also true, can also be true. We have the potential to set an example for the world that no country would wish to emulate, and rather than be an object of envy, we have the potential to be a source of confusion, a source of disbelief for our closest friends and allies; worse yet, an object of pity, or in the case of competitors and adversaries, a source of – a source of schadenfreude, a source of in some cases glee.

So the power of our example has the potential to be our greatest asset. On days like today, however, it's that example, an example that the world is clearly watching, that will have implications for our standing. And we're very mindful of that.

QUESTION: What does that mean? On this point, I mean, it really is heartbreaking. And I just want to remind everybody, since Columbine in 1999, upward of 300,000 Americans have been hit by gun violence. I mean, this year alone, this is the 27th mass shooting. Last year, 42 mass shootings. We all have kids, and grandkids in my case. I mean, you talk about genocide. Isn't this considered a genocide if you look at it in this kind of perspective, in this context for which, perhaps, the gun lobby ought to be at least partially held responsible?

MR PRICE: Said, genocide has a very specific definition, so of course I'm not going to weigh in on that. But you —

QUESTION: Massacre after massacre after massacre.

MR PRICE: You don't have to tell me – and I will just say on a personal level, I was the age of the kids

at Columbine in 1999 when they were targeted in Littleton. And now that we're nearly 25 years beyond that and there are kids in elementary schools much younger than me who have been targeted on a mass scale twice in the past 10 years, it's not lost on me; I don't think it's lost on anyone.

QUESTION: Are you aware – other than what Shaun mentioned about the Chinese foreign ministry spokesman, are you aware of instances in which rivals or adversaries have taken – you said the word “glee,” or used derision, made comments, derisive comments? And has this come up at embassies?

MR PRICE: In the aftermath of events like this, we often do receive formal notes of condolence from other governments.

QUESTION: That's understandable.

MR PRICE: I am not aware of other instances of that, but I have every expectation that my colleagues around the world who are posted in embassies and posts around the world are hearing directly from their counterparts. Again, I think it's probably a mixture of condolence, confusion, of disbelief how something like this could continue to happen. But also importantly, an air of regret. Our friends and allies around the world want us to be that beacon, they want us to be that object of envy. And when we give the world reason to pity or to change that assessment of us, it is not only not in our interests, it not only has a cost for us, but it has a cost for them, too.

QUESTION: Well, are you aware of anything that U.S. officials or the administration has found to be particularly offensive in comments from foreign governments or foreign officials?

MR PRICE: I'm not. I've heard limited public comments.

Yes.

QUESTION: Ned, on Iran, I asked you this question yesterday, but it looks like Israel and members of Congress today have welcomed the administration commitment not to de-list the IRGC. Is there any official or public commitment that you can announce today in this regard other than the reports from yesterday?

MR PRICE: I'm not in a position to speak to the details of our negotiations. You've heard us say before that we're not going to negotiate these issues in public. But what I will say – and Special Envoy Malley mentioned this in his opening statement earlier today – if Iran maintains demands that go beyond the scope of the JCPOA, we'll continue to reject them and there will be no deal. The discussions in Vienna are focused on the nuclear element, the JCPOA itself. That is what we have spent more than a year now negotiating indirectly with the Iranians. The two sides of this – one, the sanctions relief that we are prepared to take should there be a mutual return to compliance with the JCPOA; and on the other hand, the nuclear steps that Iran would need to take if there were a mutual return to compliance, the nuclear steps that would see to it that Iran is once again permanently and verifiably prohibited from obtaining a nuclear weapon.

QUESTION: And on other topic, special presidential envoy for hostage affairs has met with General Abbas on Monday, Abbas Ibrahim, and discussed U.S. citizens who are missing or detained in Syria, as a State Department spokesperson has said. What role did the U.S. ask General Ibrahim to play in this regard?

MR PRICE: Well, as you alluded to, I can confirm that Roger Carstens, our special presidential envoy for hostage affairs, did meet with General Abbas Ibrahim on May 23rd to discuss U.S. citizens who are missing or detained in Syria. You won't be surprised, Michel, to know that we are not going to comment on the specifics of those discussions beyond restating the fact that we have no higher priority than seeing the safe release of Americans who are wrongfully detained or held hostage anywhere around the world. Of course, we talked about the case of Austin Tice yesterday, an American who has been – who has been separated from his family for nearly 10 years, who has spent a quarter of his life separated from his family. He is always top of mind. The other Americans who are detained in places like Iran and Russia and Afghanistan and Venezuela and elsewhere are always top of mind for us too.

QUESTION: Do you have any information that he is still alive, and what do you expect from General Ibrahim to do after this visit?

MR PRICE: It is our goal to see Austin safely returned to his family so that he can once again give them a hug, he can be with them for the first time in 10 years. That is what we're working towards.

Yes, Shannon.

QUESTION: From that hearing this morning, we did hear a commitment from the State Department that should a deal be reached with Iran that it would be submitted to Congress for approval. Now, that's something of a departure from what Secretary Blinken said just last month. Can you explain the change?

MR PRICE: There has been no change. What we have always said is that we would follow the law, we would follow INARA. And what Special Envoy Malley clarified today is that we would submit, pursuant to INARA, for congressional approval a deal if we were to reach it.

QUESTION: But the Secretary did say that he would submit it to the lawyers. Did the lawyers make that determination?

MR PRICE: Of course, we're going to consult closely with lawyers to determine what the law – what the INARA, what the law actually stipulates in this case, and pursuant to INARA, it is our intention to submit it for congressional review if – and it's a big if – there is a mutual return to compliance with the JCPOA.

QUESTION: Well, wait a second. So you're – so then it's the lawyers first? So if – if, and it's a big if – you get a deal —

MR PRICE: No, I just said we will submit it to Congress for review pursuant to INARA.

QUESTION: Well, you said it would go to the lawyers to see what INARA requires. Is it your – is it the administration's belief that simply rejoining the 2015 deal does not constitute a new deal and that therefore it doesn't need to be submitted to review? It can be given to the Congress so they can take a look at, but it isn't subject to the delays that INARA – there's a time period here that will need to be overcome to get it done quickly if you are to get back into one. So are you saying that it will go through the whole thing, the whole INARA thing regardless?

MR PRICE: You heard from Special Envoy Malley this morning that it is our intention to submit the deal to Congress for review if we are able to get there.

QUESTION: Okay, so that means that the administration believes that even if the deal that might – you – that you might get is simply a rejoining of the 20 – of the JCPOA as it existed in 2015, that means that you will still submit – the administration still believes that it should and will submit —

MR PRICE: It is our intention to submit it to Congress for review.

Yes.

QUESTION: A couple things on Russia. Nobel Peace Prize winner Dmitry Muratov will be – I believe he’s already at the State Department. He’s got a meeting with Deputy Secretary Donfried. Increasingly, Russian journalists back at home and abroad are under pressure. Most recently we had two reporters that got charged for, I believe, disseminating, quote/unquote, “fake news.” And separately but not unrelated, Duma recently passed another legislation going after English-speaking-language media, to ease up prosecutions against them without any court order. But – meeting with Muratov is one way to express your support, but can you be more specific how you’re going to support those Russian journalists and foreign media at home and abroad who are trying to be truth-tellers in this crucial time?

MR PRICE: Yes. So, importantly, one of the elements of that is to stand in solidarity with those Russian journalists, many of whom are inside Russia operating under what even before Russia’s invasion of Ukraine could have been described as incredibly difficult. Now, of course, President Putin’s efforts to manipulate even further the information environment to suppress the truth, to keep from his people the true motivations, the true costs, the true consequences of this war have made the operating environment for journalists in Russia even more difficult. And of course, the Duma has done its part: the sentencing, the potential for jail terms for anyone who would dare call this war anything other than the benign-sounding special military operation.

We have seen Russian media outlets have to shutter their operations. We have seen journalists forced to flee Russia. We have also seen – and you referenced a couple cases – journalists who have been thrown behind bars for their persistence in doing nothing but peacefully continuing to perform their indispensable function, a function that is indispensable inside Russia and a function that is indispensable for those of us living and viewing this from afar.

It is our goal to do everything we can responsibly to see to it that the information environment in Russia is not further constrained. That’s precisely why we have urged stakeholders around the world not to enact so-called internet blackouts on Russia, to keep information flowing to Russia, to keep the internet free and open and interoperable within Russia itself.

Now, of course, this is very challenging for any country to do given the fact that the Kremlin really

does have a tight grip on the information flow, but we will continue to do what we can to support Russian journalists, to support Russian media organizations that are attempting to do their work, whether they are now located outside of Russia or to those who are remaining inside Russia.

QUESTION: Another Russia-related question, if I may?

QUESTION: On Saudi Arabia?

MR PRICE: One more question?

QUESTION: Yeah. On cyber security, you expressed previously your concerns about Russia's cyber activities. There are signals, most recently coming from Moscow – National Security Council Deputy Secretary (inaudible) sent out a message saying that they are planning to put together agreements between Russia and a number of countries such as Serbia, Tajikistan, Azerbaijan. I'm just wondering what kind of reaction would that invite from the West if they move forward with that.

MR PRICE: Well, to put it mildly, the Russian Federation has not proved itself to be a responsible actor in cyberspace. So we would certainly caution countries against entering into such agreements.

Yes.

QUESTION: On Saudi Arabia, Axios reported that two advisors for President Biden, Brett McGurk and Hochstein, are actually on a secret mission or secret trip to Saudi Arabia for a possible increase in oil production for – to discuss the islands and for possible normalization. Are you aware of that or can you comment on this?

MR PRICE: I've seen the report. I don't have any travel to speak to at this time. We have spoken at length, including at senior levels, about the critical importance of the strategic ties between the United States and Saudi Arabia, how strengthening those ties, putting those ties on stable footing, can work to the benefit of both countries. I think we've seen that across different realms in recent weeks, in recent months.

We've talked about Yemen here. Now that we have a truce, something that our Saudi partners were quite helpful in helping working with the UN special envoy, working with our special envoy, working with other stakeholders in the region to achieve, it has enabled humanitarian access to parts of the

country that have been denied critical humanitarian supplies for far too long, and it has quelled the violence that has plagued Yemen for far too long dating back to 2014.

We have, of course, seen welcome steps with regards to the kingdom's relationship with Lebanon, the kingdom's relationship with its other Gulf neighbors, but the fact is that many of these steps also work to our benefit. Of course, there are 70,000 Americans who live in Saudi Arabia. They – these Americans, like our Saudi partners, are encountering legitimate security threats. So we'll continue to work closely with our Saudi partners to counter the threats to both of our interests as we continue to support a relationship that works to the benefit of both of our countries.

QUESTION: Thank you.

MR PRICE: Yes.

QUESTION: China is also said to be pursuing a new regional agreement with Pacific Island nations that would expand Beijing's role in policing maritime cooperation and cyber security. They're also planning to offer scholarships for more than 2,000 workers and young diplomats from the region. Do you see this as a reaction to President Biden's trip to Japan and meeting with allies? And what concerns do you have about this expanded regional agreement, if any?

MR PRICE: I think it would be a stretch to call this a reaction to President Biden's engagement. I think this may be a reflection – the PRC's response to our sustained engagement with the region since we came into office. Of course, President Biden's visit to Japan, to South Korea, was only the latest element of that, but we have had senior officials from the White House, senior officials from the State Department, travel to the region, including to the Pacific Islands region, to speak of our vision for an affirmative partnership with the countries of the region.

This is precisely what Secretary Blinken laid out when – from Indonesia. He spoke of our Indo-Pacific strategy, our strategy for the region that depicts the United States as a partner of choice, not a partner of compulsion, and since we have repeatedly and consistently spoken of what we can bring to the relationships with countries in the Pacific Islands.

When it comes to what we have seen of the PRC's foreign minister's intention to travel, we're aware of media reports of his travel. We are also aware that China seeks to negotiate a range of arrangements during the foreign minister's visit to the region. We are concerned that these

reported agreements may be negotiated in a rushed, non-transparent process. At the same time, we respect the ability of countries of the region to make sovereign decisions in the best interests of their people.

It's worth noting that the PRC has a pattern of offering shadowy, vague deals with little transparency or regional consultation in areas related to fishing, related to resource management, development assistance, and more recently, even security practices. And these recent security agreements have been conducted with little regional consultation, provoking public concern not only in the United States but across the Indo-Pacific region. And we don't believe that importing security forces from the PRC and their methods will help any Pacific Island country; on the other hand, doing so could only seek to fuel regional and international tensions and increase concerns over Beijing's expansion of internal – of its internal security apparatus to the Pacific.

So we have had recent engagements with our Pacific Island counterparts; this, of course, was a discussion in the context of the Quad at the leader level with President Biden and the newly sworn-in Australian prime minister and our other Quad partners. This, of course, was a topic of discussion when Secretary Blinken traveled to the Pacific Island region in February and spoke in very concrete terms regarding what the United States is able to offer in our affirmative partnerships.

Yes?

QUESTION: Ned, there is an Iraqi delegation in town. Did any official from this building meet with them?

MR PRICE: I do not know offhand. If there was a meeting, we'll let you know.

QUESTION: Sorry, just back on the Pacific – on the islands. I mean, China is also an Indo-Pacific country, correct?

MR PRICE: Correct.

QUESTION: And so you – as long as it's benign, you wouldn't have any issue with them signing deals, right?

MR PRICE: Of course. These are sovereign decisions of individual countries.

QUESTION: Okay. Okay. So the importation of non – of security forces from countries other than China into the Pacific Island region wouldn't cause an issue with you?

MR PRICE: The importation of – I'm sorry?

QUESTION: Non-Chinese security forces. I don't know, say Australians or Americans or non-Chinese.

MR PRICE: What we have seen – these are —

QUESTION: These are sovereign decisions for the Pacific Islands to make.

MR PRICE: These are sovereign decisions. Our concern is that when the PRC has grown increasingly involved in the region in these – with various countries, we've seen a range of behavior that can only be described as increasingly problematic: assertion of unlawful maritime claims, ongoing militarization of disputed features in the South China Sea, predatory economic activities including illegal unregulated fishing, and then the investments that are extractive rather than beneficial to the countries that are subject to them, that often undermine good governance, often fuel corruption, and often undermine protections for human rights.

QUESTION: Can I just follow up —

MR PRICE: Yes.

QUESTION: – one more time on that? The – I know you said that – the concerns that they're not transparent. Is there diplomacy on the part of the United States with the South Pacific nations specifically on this asking them either to reject it or to look at it more carefully?

MR PRICE: We look at this not through the China lens, but through the lens of how we can partner with these countries. So our pitch to them is not the negative; it is very much the affirmative. It is what the United States can bring to the table, how we bring it to the table, the high standards that we bring in terms of our partnerships, in terms of our investments, and how, when we work together, when we work together cooperatively, we can benefit both of our peoples.

Yes, sir.

QUESTION: Yes. Ned, I have two questions on Turkey and Greece. The first question is that there have been – is it true that the United States are mediating between Greece and Turkey to end the crisis caused by President Erdoğan? If you don't have an answer, can you take that question?

MR PRICE: Mediating between —

QUESTION: Mediating between Athens and Ankara.

MR PRICE: We talked about this yesterday.

QUESTION: Yes.

MR PRICE: We encourage our NATO Allies, including, of course, Greece and Turkey, to work together to maintain peace and security in the region and to resolve their differences diplomatically. We also encourage them to avoid rhetoric that could further raise tensions.

QUESTION: But when you say you encourage, you talk to them? You mediate?

MR PRICE: We – these are – these have been – this has been a topic of discussions with our Greece and Turkish allies.

QUESTION: I have another question I asked you yesterday but you didn't give me an answer. What are you going to do if Turkey attacks Greece? Because there are a lot of reports that Erdogan is planning to invade the Greek islands. The situation is very serious.

MR PRICE: That is a hypothetical that I'm just not going to entertain. Again, our message remains to both our allies – in this case, Turkey and Greece – that they should work together to maintain peace and security in the region and to resolve any differences diplomatically.

Yes.

QUESTION: Is there a contingency at NATO, what happens if one Ally attacks another? Do all the other ones gang up and come to the —

MR PRICE: That would be a question best directed at NATO.

Yes.

QUESTION: But there are (inaudible), I mean, Greece and Turkey went at it, right?

MR PRICE: Yes, please.

QUESTION: Thank you, Ned. I had a question about something that you mentioned yesterday. You said you're deeply concerned about the potential escalation of the military situation in Syria. Have you communicated that to your Turkish counterparts? And are there or will there be any diplomatic efforts to convince Turkey not to escalate the situation there?

MR PRICE: We have engaged with our Turkish allies on this question, in the first instance, to learn more about the proposal that President Erdogan first voiced within recent days. We've done so from our embassy, from the department here as well.

Yes.

QUESTION: Yemen?

MR PRICE: Yes.

QUESTION: So the truce deadline is approaching. Can you tell us about – anything about the effort to extend the truce?

MR PRICE: We'll have more to say as the time gets closer, but this has been a priority of ours, in the first instance not only to lay the groundwork for the humanitarian truce, groundwork that took – that was set in place over the course of many months of our Special Envoy Tim Lenderking working very closely with the UN's special envoy – Hans Grundberg in this case – working closely with our Saudi partners, working closely with other Gulf partners, working closely with other stakeholders in the region. We have sought to consolidate and to reinforce the truce not only because it brings additional stability and security to the people of Yemen, but because it has very practical effects. It has allowed humanitarian aid to reach individuals in parts of Yemen that have not been able to receive adequate aid for far too long.

We have also seen concrete steps in terms of the first flights that have departed Yemen en route to

Amman. We have seen encouraging signs that the parties are looking to consolidate and to perpetuate the current conditions and the steps that have given way to this.

QUESTION: Ned, on —

QUESTION: So you're optimistic?

MR PRICE: Again, I'm not going to be optimistic, I'm not going to be pessimistic, but we are going to do everything we can diplomatically to reinforce the humanitarian truce and the increased stability and security that we've seen in recent weeks.

QUESTION: On Yemen, are you aware of reports that – of the death of former USAID employee Abdul Hamid Al-Ajmi, who was one of the people who was taken hostage, prisoner by the Houthis?

MR PRICE: As you know, Matt, we've been unceasing in our diplomatic efforts to seek the release of our Yemeni staff in Sana'a. We've demanded that the Houthis release our detained current and former U.S. locally employed Yemeni staff in Sana'a. We're committed to ensuring the safety of those who have served with us. When it comes to this case, we were deeply saddened by the news of the death of one of our retired employees. This individual passed away in Houthi detention with no contact with his family during the last six months of his life. We express our most sincere condolences to his family and loved ones, but we're not in a position to provide further detail.

QUESTION: Well, okay, maybe not, but is it your understanding that the only reason that he was taken prisoner is because of his affiliation or former affiliation with the embassy, with the U.S. Government?

MR PRICE: We have seen a number of former LE staff, individuals who previously worked with and for our embassy in Sana'a, held in detention. I couldn't speak to the motivations, but of course, the former affiliation is a commonality that many of these detainees share.

Yes.

QUESTION: On Lebanon, Ned, the situation at all levels is deteriorating rapidly there. Is there any U.S. plan to intervene, to help, to pressure the officials to move forward with reforms there?

MR PRICE: Well, we spoke of this in the immediate aftermath of the May 15th parliamentary elections, but we were pleased to see that the elections took place on time in Lebanon and without major security incidents. The most difficult tasks now await. We encourage Lebanon's political leaders to recommit themselves to the hard work that lies ahead to implement the needed reforms, including the reforms that are necessary to rescue the economy.

We also urge the swift formation of a government capable of and committed to undertaking the hard work required to restore the confidence of the Lebanese people and the international community. The economy, of course, is in quite dire straits. These reforms are necessary for a number of reasons, including the fact that they are required to bring the IMF agreement to fruition to help rescue Lebanon's economy and put it back on the path towards sustainability and success.

QUESTION: On this topic too, Assistant Secretary Barbara Leaf has met with other U.S. officials with the Lebanese foreign minister in Washington. Can you elaborate on that meeting? What did they discuss?

MR PRICE: I suspect our Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs will have a readout for you for that.

Yes.

QUESTION: Back to Iran quickly. There is some reporting that the U.S. has seized a cargo of Iranian crude oil from a Russian-flagged tanker in Greece or in Greek waters. I wondered – I think that this ship had been seized last month, but I wonder if you could confirm the U.S. action to seize that.

And separately, the State Department announced today some new sanctions on an oil-smuggling, money-laundering network linked to the Qods Force. I wonder with these kind of – these kind of actions happening while you insist that you're still trying to get back into the JCPOA, don't they signal to Iran – or don't they send sort of an opposite message to Iran in terms of trying to get back into the deal that you are taking these specific actions against the Iranians?

MR PRICE: I couldn't speak to the signal that Iran is receiving. The signal that we are sending is that we are not going to tolerate the illicit activities of the Qods Force, of other Iranian proxies, terrorist groups, that receive Iranian support. We have been clear all along that we absolutely seek a mutual return to compliance with the JCPOA that would, in the first instance, put Iran's nuclear program back into a box, to once again permanently and verifiably prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear

weapon; but at the same time, we are going to use every appropriate authority that we have to take on the broader set of challenges that Iran poses. That includes its support for proxies. That includes its support for terrorist groups. That includes its other destabilizing activities in the region. That includes its ballistic missile program.

The fact is that every single challenge, including those I just listed and more, is made all the more difficult to address as long as Iran's nuclear program is in a position to gallop forward without the strict limits that the JCPOA previously imposed.

So we are continuing down this dual path to attempt to put these strict limits back on Iran's nuclear program just as we push back and hold Iran accountable for its other illicit activities, but also knowing that if and when we permanently and verifiably have Iran's nuclear program once again contained and confined, we are going to be able to take on these other challenges together with our allies and partners – and in some cases, potentially diplomatically as well – much more effectively knowing that an unconstrained Iranian nuclear program would be the most significant threat that we can and do face.

QUESTION: And on the tanker?

MR PRICE: On the tanker, I don't have anything to offer.

Yes.

QUESTION: On Iran and Russia, can you fill us in on the statement that you guys put out there this morning in terms of designating a network that involves Russian – high-level Russian officials and IRGC? Are there other countries involved? Is there an ongoing investigation behind this action?

MR PRICE: So the Department of the Treasury can provide you the full set of details on this. It essentially boils down to the fact that one of the designated individuals has raised funds for the Qods Force in coordination with senior levels of the Russian Government and intelligence apparatus. But I understand my colleagues at the Department of the Treasury can provide you fuller details.

QUESTION: Do you have the name?

MR PRICE: I'm sorry?

QUESTION: Is the person a Kremlin —

MR PRICE: They can get you the full details.

QUESTION: Okay. And my last question —

QUESTION: No, hold on. Just back to the ACA just for one second? I don't know if you — I don't know if you know the answer to this, or maybe you could get it, or if it's just a stupid question. But do you know, for the funding of the ACA and for the Observatory and any other efforts to bring accountability to war crimes, alleged war crimes that are being committed in Ukraine, is there any money in the 40 billion that Congress just passed and that the President signed over the weekend that could be used for this, or is it all for weapons?

MR PRICE: It is certainly not all for weapons. About, as I recall —

QUESTION: Is it all military assistance?

MR PRICE: It is certainly not all military assistance. There is a good chunk of humanitarian assistance. There's a good chunk of economic assistance.

QUESTION: So from that — from the humanitarian or the other, the non-military component of it, will any of that money go to pay for these investigations?

MR PRICE: We've funded some of these organizations and programs prior to the recent passage of this supplemental spending bill, but if there's anything in the additional 40 billion we'll let you know.

Thank you.

QUESTION: Thank you.

(The briefing was concluded at 3:11 p.m.)

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Department Press Briefing – May 24, 2022

2:13 p.m. EDT

MR PRICE: Good afternoon. Happy Monday. I am at your disposal.

QUESTION: Taiwan.

MR PRICE: Taiwan.

QUESTION: Is the U.S. policy still ambiguous? Is it your – the President, of course, said there was no change today, but there was – in light of his remarks over the weekend, can you say what the U.S. policy is? Is there – will the U.S. militarily defend Taiwan in case of an invasion?

MR PRICE: As you heard from the President today, as you heard from the President the other day in Tokyo when President Biden said, and I quote, “Our policy towards Taiwan has not changed at all. We remain committed to supporting the peace and stability across the Taiwan Straits and ensuring there is no unilateral change to the status quo.” That is where we were then. That is where we are today, as you heard the President say again today.

What the President said is that our policy is not changed. He reiterated that our “one China” policy and our commitment to peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait, of course, remains. He also reiterated our commitment under the Taiwan Relations Act to provide Taiwan with the military means to defend itself. In short, there has been no change.

QUESTION: But the fact that he’s saying that there is a – the U.S. would defend Taiwan, I mean, do you think that the Taiwanese should feel more reassured than they were before about the possibility of a U.S. military defense?

MR PRICE: The Taiwanese should feel reassured that we will continue to comply with and to fully satisfy our commitments under the Taiwan Relations Acts – Taiwan Relations Act, that we will do so consistent with our “one China” policy and the other documents, including the three Joint Communiqués and the Six Assurances.

QUESTION: Let me follow up on one more point there. You tweeted just a couple days prior to this

that Beijing is misrepresenting the U.S. position on “one China,” on the “one China” principle. The President himself said that we agree with – on “one China.” Could you state what that means?

MR PRICE: Sure.

QUESTION: Is mean, is there any inconsistency there? Does the United States agree with the Chinese interpretation of it?

MR PRICE: Well, the Chinese – the PRC has frequently attempted to misrepresent our policy in their briefings and statements from senior PRC officials. Let me just give you one example of that. The English version of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs readout of the call between our National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and Wang Jiechi^[1] on May 18th incorrectly stated that, quote, “The U.S. pursues the ‘one China’ principle.” Beijing’s – and this is important – “one China” principle is not the same as our “one China” policy. In a May 12th press briefing, the PRC spokesperson stated that we had made a quote/unquote “commitment to uphold the ‘one China’ principle.” That is also not correct.

We are committed to upholding our “one China” policy, which, again, is guided by the Taiwan Relations Act, the three U.S. Joint China Communiques, and the Six Assurances. The PRC statements attempt to mischaracterize our position and our policy. Our longstanding – longstanding, bipartisan “one China” policy has not changed. These are policy issues of enormous sensitivity, and we are, I think, appropriately careful and precise with our language, and we urge the PRC to cease its mischaracterization of U.S. policy and statements from senior U.S. officials.

Yes.

QUESTION: Well, the problem with that is that – you’re quibbling with the word “principle” instead of “policy?”

MR PRICE: It is – it has a different meaning.

QUESTION: Well —

MR PRICE: We stand by our “one China” policy.

QUESTION: So what’s your understanding of the difference between “one China” principle and “one

China" policy?

MR PRICE: We have a "one China" policy, as we said.

QUESTION: But what is the difference between that and "one China" principle?

MR PRICE: We have heard from the PRC that there are so-called commitments under the – under what they call the "one China" principle that are distinct from our "one China" policy. And again —

QUESTION: So it's broader?

MR PRICE: We are having this conversation now because for us it is important to underscore that we comply with, we abide by, our "one China" policy. It is a policy that, as we have said, is guided by the Taiwan Relations Act, the three U.S.-China Joint Communiques, and the Six Assurances.

QUESTION: Well, maybe you could just like change the name of "policy" to "principle" without changing what's in it, and then you can all be happy.

MR PRICE: I'll take that suggestion onboard. Yes.

QUESTION: Just on Taiwan.

MR PRICE: Sure.

QUESTION: Ned, so I mean, I understand that you guys in the aftermath, President's aide and he himself said the policy isn't changed, but he also did say yes to a question which was asked whether United States would be willing to get involved militarily. I'm sure you guys have internal talks about this and he – since he did say yes, does that mean Washington would be willing to commit troops to battle in defense of Taiwan?

MR PRICE: The President was not announcing any change in our policy. The President actually —

QUESTION: But the question was like very, very clear, and he did say yes.

MR PRICE: Well, but —

QUESTION: And this is not the first time that he —

MR PRICE: But you are also – you are also omitting what he said when he started the question. I don't want to embarrass you; I know you walked in a couple minutes late, but I did start by saying —

QUESTION: There was no 2-minute warning.

MR PRICE: I did start by saying that the President, when he was asked, very clearly stated, and I quote, "Our policy towards Taiwan has not – has not changed at all. We remain committed to supporting the peace and stability across the Taiwan Straits and ensuring that there is no unilateral change to the status quo." He went on to say we've made a commitment. We support the "one China" policy. We support all that we've done in the past to ensure that Taiwan has what it needs to defend itself. That is consistent with the Taiwan Relations Act.

QUESTION: Okay, I'm going to join the group of people who can't see how the two things are compatible together. But just on this China-Russia exercise, I'm just wondering if this is the kind of action for United States that requires a response from you and allies, perhaps beyond rhetoric. And if that's the case, what kind of response would that be?

MR PRICE: So to your question, Humeyra, the PRC and Russia did conduct a joint military patrol involving their strategic bombers on May 24th. The patrol, as we understand it, traversed the Sea of Japan and continued through the East China Sea and the Philippine Sea. This exercise was likely planned well in advance by both countries, and Beijing's decision to cooperate with Moscow in this way amid Russia's further invasion of Ukraine and the Kremlin's dangerous nuclear rhetoric demonstrates the quote/unquote "no limits" partnerships that they talked about in their joint communique is quite alive and well.

And the President's – on the other hand, the President's successful visit to the ROK and Japan, where he met with our treaty allies on a bilateral basis, where he also convened the Quad for the fourth time during this administration, coupled with the launch of discussions on IPEF, the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework – that demonstrates a stark contrast to what we've seen from Russia and China. It demonstrates our commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific region. That was at the heart of the President's visit to Japan, to the Republic of Korea, and you also heard from the President and senior officials while there more about our longstanding commitment to the defense of those allies, including Japan and the ROK. We've consistently made the point that attempts to

intimidate U.S. allies and partners will only strengthen our collective resolve. Of course, we have discussed and worked very closely with Japan, with the ROK, on matters of defense and deterrence.

Barbara.

QUESTION: Staying on China, the BBC has a report out today on Xinjiang which is based on data from police computers in the region, and they – it lays out in meticulous detail the way police have been targeting any expression of Uyghur identity or culture and also evidence that the chain of command runs all the way up to Xi Jinping. So I wanted to ask, first of all, does the State Department have any reaction to the information in the report?

MR PRICE: So I did happen to see that report. We are appalled by the reports and the jarring images of the PRC's internment camps in Xinjiang from 2018, those reports that are – and those images that are being shared online. Unfortunately, the PRC's genocide and crimes against humanity against predominantly Muslim Uyghurs and Muslims of other ethnic and religious minority groups remains ongoing in Xinjiang, and this new reporting further adds to an already damning body of evidence of the PRC's atrocities in Xinjiang, including evidence previously disclosed in earlier publicly [sic] reporting, seen in satellite imagery, and gathered via witness testimony from survivors and escapees of the internment and forced labor camps.

Despite increasing public awareness and strong calls for accountability, the PRC Government continues to deny any wrongdoing. We are deeply concerned by the PRC's failure to acknowledge and to stop these atrocities and to transparently address the chorus of concerns raised by the international community. And we'll continue to work with our partners and our allies to promote accountability for those responsible for these atrocities. We have and we continue to call on the PRC to immediately release all those arbitrarily detained people; to abolish the internment camps; to end mass detention, torture, forced sterilization, and the use of forced labor.

QUESTION: And does the State Department assess that the chain of command on Uyghur repression runs directly up to the president?

MR PRICE: I don't want to offer a tactical assessment of that, but I will just say in a system like the PRC's, it would be very difficult to imagine that a systemic effort to suppress, to detain, to conduct a campaign of genocide and crimes against humanity, would not have the blessing, would not have the approval, of the highest levels of the PRC Government.

QUESTION: Can I follow up on this?

MR PRICE: Sure.

QUESTION: This, of course, happens as the UN high commissioner for human rights is in China. Do you think this adds any complications to her visit? Do you think that she should be looking specifically at this? Are you at all optimistic that she will get more answers?

MR PRICE: We discussed this on Friday, and I then voiced our deep concerns about the upcoming visit of the High Commissioner Michelle Bachelet to the People's Republic of China. Based on our understanding of the planned restrictions that she will be subjected to during the visit, we have no expectation that the PRC will grant the necessary access required to conduct a complete, unmanipulated assessment of the human rights environment in Xinjiang. We think it was a mistake to agree to a visit under these circumstances where the high commissioner will not be granted the type of unhindered access – free and full access – that would be required to do a complete assessment, and to come back with a full picture of the atrocities, the crimes against humanity, and the genocide ongoing in Xinjiang.

QUESTION: Sorry, did I just – you went – in your response to Barbara's second question about whether the chain of command went all the way up to the president of China, in your response, are you suggesting that it's hard for the U.S. to believe that President Xi, or his inner circle, his top aides, didn't – did not specifically order war crimes – well, crimes against humanity —

MR PRICE: I don't believe I said "war crimes."

QUESTION: Well, you said "crimes against humanity."

MR PRICE: Correct.

QUESTION: Crimes against humanity. Are you saying that you —

MR PRICE: I believe the question was: Are they aware of it?

QUESTION: Yeah, but you said it would be difficult —

QUESTION: No, I said that the chain of command runs up to the president.

MR PRICE: Right. So —

QUESTION: So is it the — so is it the administration's position that President Xi, or his inner circle, have, like, specifically directed local authorities on the ground to commit crimes against humanity?

MR PRICE: I believe what I said is that it would be hard for us to imagine that the type of systemic atrocities, crimes against humanity, and ongoing campaign of genocide would not — that the senior-most levels of the PRC Government would be unaware of it.

QUESTION: No, no, not unaware, but that they ordered it.

MR PRICE: Again, I don't want to speak to specific potential crimes against humanity, specific acts, but what we're seeing is not a one-off occurrence. What we're seeing is a systemic campaign of repression, of crimes against humanity, of genocide.

Yes.

QUESTION: I don't know if you made any statement regarding the Turkish plan to control more territories in north Syria or if you have any comment on that.

MR PRICE: Yes, I do. So we are deeply concerned about reports and discussions of potential increased military activity in northern Syria, and in particular its impact on the civilian population there. We condemn any escalation. We support maintenance of the current ceasefire lines. We believe it's crucial for all sides to maintain and to respect the ceasefire zones, to — that serve to enhance stability in Syria, and to work towards a political solution to this conflict. We expect Turkey to live up to the October 2019 joint statement, including to halt offensive operations in northeast Syria, and we recognize Turkey's legitimate security concerns on Turkey's southern border. But any new offensive would further undermine regional stability and put at risk U.S. forces in the coalition's campaign against ISIS.

Yes.

QUESTION: A couple questions on Russia-Ukraine. Today marks three months of the war. Let me

start with the Secretary's call with Ukrainian foreign minister. One of the topics was about unblocking food export. The question is: What are you going to do about it? Will there be U.S. warships involved to ease up the situation, or —

MR PRICE: Sorry, I —

QUESTION: A U.S. warship. Are you considering sending a U.S. warship to the Black Sea to help Ukraine on this?

MR PRICE: So we are deeply concerned with the attendant consequences and implications of Russia's war against Ukraine. And one of the most concerning trend lines has been the rise in food prices, the rise in commodity prices that Russia's war has precipitated. This is, of course, a result of the fact that much of Ukraine has been subjected to Russian aggression, to Russian violence. There has been death and destruction wrought by Russian forces. But also because Russia's forces have seemingly targeted silos; they have targeted ships containing foodstuffs. They have, of course, made impossible the task of completing the cycle of planting and harvesting for the country of Ukraine, a country that is a major supplier of both wheat and fertilizer to the region and well beyond.

And so this is precisely why we have sought to do several things. First and foremost, the most effective means by which to put an end to the spike in food prices is, of course, the — it would, of course, be — to be to put an end to Russia's aggression against Ukraine. That's what we have sought to support, including by strengthening Ukraine's hand at the negotiating table as we hold Moscow to account with the sanctions and other measures, including the export controls that we have placed.

We have also — and you saw this last week, when Secretary Blinken was in New York City — we have focused on the task of shining a spotlight on this, but also engaging in concerted diplomacy. And the ministerial last week brought together dozens of countries, including countries that are in need of additional food supplies, that are suffering from President Putin's war and the attendant rise in food and commodity prices, and those countries who are in a position to potentially do something about it, whether that is to donate funds, whether that is to make in-kind donations, in-kind contributions to those countries who are in need of additional food.

Of course, the UN secretary-general has been deeply engaged in this as well. He has been working

very closely with our Ukrainian partners, with our Turkish allies, and others to determine if there are ways to help facilitate the export of Ukrainian food supplies. That is something that we stand ready to assist, knowing that it is in the – not only our national interest, but of course in the interest of those countries that have been deeply affected by the rise in food prices.

QUESTION: One more question on Ukraine. There are rumors about the U.S. considering sending special operations forces to Kyiv to protect the embassy. Is that on the table?

MR PRICE: We are – as we always are, we're in close discussions with our colleagues at the Department of Defense about security requirements for our resumed operations at our embassy in Kyiv. We haven't made any decisions about the potential return of U.S. military members to Ukraine for that purpose, and that purpose being an effort to guard our embassy compound. We have said all along that U.S. forces are not engaged with conflict with Russia, and we have worked to put in place mechanisms to avoid the potential for escalation. But as you know, we don't make a habit of commenting on our security mechanisms or requirements, and so we'll leave that there.

Yes.

QUESTION: Thank you. The Senate passed 40 billion Ukraine aid bill last week and the State Department provided additional 100 million. In this situation, we're just witnessing some suggestions that Ukraine must make some concessions to Russia to end this war, and one of the statements was in Davos, Switzerland by the former secretary of state. I wonder if you could give me your commentary on that, please?

MR PRICE: Our commentary on that is that it's not for the United States to decide how and when this war should end. It is for the Ukrainian Government, representation of the Ukrainian people, to determine how and when this war should end. It is our task to support our Ukrainian partners, to see to it – as I've said before – that their hand at the negotiating table is as strong as it could possibly be. And so that's why, to your question about the \$40.1 billion in additional assistance that's now been signed into law, we are in a position to provide more security assistance, we are in a position to provided more economic assistance, we are in a position to provide more humanitarian assistance, just as we will continue to impose increasing costs on Russia, should it not end its war against the Ukrainian people and the Ukrainian Government.

QUESTION: And quickly, the second question, there will be NATO summit in Madrid next month.

We understand in today's (inaudible) agenda is Sweden, Finland membership. However, there are some countries who are trying to get membership action plan, I mean, Ukraine and Georgia. What is administration's position on further expanding NATO?

MR PRICE: Our position is that NATO's door should and must remain open. It should and must remain open for all aspirant countries. Right now, we have two applicant countries whose accession is pending before the Alliance. These are countries that have worked closely with NATO over the course of decades. We have worked closely together militarily. We – these are developed democracies. They are fully integrated in terms of, with NATO militarily. They're close partners of the United States; they're close partners of many members of the Alliance. That, in large part, is what undergirds our assessment that their accession process will be swift. It is something that we are confident will continue to have support from the Alliance and its membership.

QUESTION: Thank you.

MR PRICE: Yes.

QUESTION: As Russia appears to be making some gains in Ukraine, Ukraine has ramped up calls for multiple launch rocket systems, and they've even said that it's a potential that they could clear sea routes for trade in that case, and other allies have been ramping up the kind of supplies they're giving to Ukraine. What's the administration's temperature on that?

MR PRICE: Well, in terms of what we've been doing, no country has provided more security assistance to Ukraine than the United States – \$3.8 billion since the start of this invasion alone, since February 24th; more than approximately \$4.5 billion since the start of this administration. What we have done is our – is to provide our Ukrainian partners with weapons and systems that are appropriate with the contours of the battle in which they find themselves. The systems that we provided early on in this conflict, the types of systems that they would need to defend urban centers like Kyiv, of course, are going to be different systems than we have provided more recently, in more recent weeks, as the battle has shifted to the east and to the south, as the Russians have narrowed – been forced to narrow their war aims given the effective resistance and the effective defense that our Ukrainian partners have managed to muster with the enabling support of the United States and the security assistance that both we and dozens of countries around the world across four continents have provided.

So these are discussions that we constantly have with our Ukrainian partners, as has been alluded to already. Secretary Blinken had an opportunity to speak to Foreign Minister Kuleba earlier today. Oftentimes in those conversations, Foreign Minister Kuleba does relay needs and the assessment of needs from Ukraine to the United States. In response to those calls, the Secretary, in turn, often does get on the phone, get in contact with countries that may have systems or capabilities or models of systems that the United States doesn't have in our inventory. So this is a constant dialogue, a constant conversation to ensure that our Ukrainian partners have precisely what they need when they need it and where they need it.

Yes.

QUESTION: So yesterday, the Ukrainian prosecutor general mentioned that they are investigating more than 13,000 war crimes now. She also said that because Ukraine is not a signatory to the Rome Statute that certain crimes in Ukraine cannot be prosecuted by the ICC. And at the same time, the chance of establishing an international criminal tribunal similar to the ones for Yugoslavia and Rwanda seems low since those were established by UN Security Council resolutions. China and Russia, of course, would almost certainly veto such a resolution for Ukraine.

Is the U.S. still considering supporting an international criminal tribunal for Ukraine? And what mechanisms exist for establishing a viable tribunal without the support of the UN Security Council?

MR PRICE: Well, we're supporting all appropriate mechanisms, and right now, we are providing extensive support to the Ukrainian prosecutor general and to her team, as we've discussed. The prosecutor general and her team have appropriate jurisdiction, they have the capabilities, they have the wherewithal that, with our support, can be effective at holding to account those who are responsible for war crimes. We've already seen one Russian soldier not only go on trial but plead guilty for the crime that he has committed.

Now, of course, the war crimes have been committed seemingly at scale, and so this will be a large-scale effort. It will have deep requirements. We are prepared to continue our support for the Ukrainian prosecutor general, providing expertise, providing funding, providing information – part of that effort to collect, to analyze, to document, and to share the evidence of war crimes with the Ukrainian prosecutor general and her team.

Now, of course, this is not the only venue that we've talked about. The Moscow Mechanism

emanating from the OSCE is another important tool. We worked with the Human Rights Council at the UN to help establish a commission of inquiry on potential war crimes in Ukraine. There are other mechanisms, including the ICC, and we did welcome the announcement by the prosecutor general of the effort to investigate potential war crimes in Ukraine that we are prepared to support as well.

Yes.

QUESTION: Sir, the President of Turkey Erdoğan said yesterday that Greek prime minister no longer existed for him after he visited the United States and met with President Biden. Also, Erdoğan is threatening Greece with war. Please, I wondered if you have any comment on this very serious escalation. And what are you going to do if Turkey attacks Greece? Thank you.

MR PRICE: Well, we continue to encourage our NATO Allies, of course, including Greece and Turkey, to work together to maintain peace and security in the region and to resolve differences diplomatically. We urge our allies to avoid rhetoric that could further raise tensions. As you know, the Greek prime minister was in Washington last week. The administration had a very good, important set of meetings with our Greek counterparts. We know that Greece is an indispensable partner and a key NATO Ally to the United States. Similarly, Turkey is an important partner of the United States, an important NATO Ally. We want to see our partners work together to maintain peace and security in the region.

Yes.

QUESTION: On North Korea, South Korean officials today said North Korea has finished preparations for a seventh nuclear test. Does the United States share that assessment?

MR PRICE: We share the concern that North Korea may be on the verge of another provocation. This is a concern that we have spoken of for some time now. We have said for the past couple weeks – we have spoken of our expectation that the DPRK may undertake an additional provocation either during the course of the President's visit to the region, which has now essentially concluded, or in the days that followed. Our concern for another potential provocation, be it an ICBM launch, be it a potential seventh nuclear weapons test, our concern has not abated in any way.

Yes.

QUESTION: What would a U.S. response look like or a coordinated response look like? It's unlikely there's going to be any additional UN Security Council sanctions given current relations with China and Russia.

MR PRICE: Again, I don't want to get ahead of where we are, but we believe it is important for the international community to weigh in on the side of accountability for these provocations, to impose costs on the DPRK for its continued provocations. This is something that we are discussing with our allies and partners in New York. It is something that the President had an opportunity to discuss in Japan and the ROK as well. He made clear that our commitment to the defense of our treaty allies Japan and South Korea is ironclad. We will continue to work closely with them to ensure that we are postured appropriately in terms of our defense and deterrence, and to continue to impose appropriate costs on the DPRK should its provocations continue, as we are concerned they might.

Said.

QUESTION: Yes, thank you. Sorry about missing the beginning, but —

MR PRICE: Oh, no problem.

QUESTION: — I – we did not hear the call. Can I switch to the Palestinians —

QUESTION: It wasn't that you didn't hear it.

QUESTION: There wasn't one.

QUESTION: There wasn't one.

QUESTION: There wasn't one, okay. All right. Apologies. I don't know if you talked about the killing of Shireen Abu Akleh in the beginning, Ned. Maybe not. But it's been two weeks, and I wonder if you saw the review today by AP that basically puts it squarely and – that put the blame squarely almost on the Israelis, so – and Israel. I mean, a lot has happened in the last couple weeks. Israel said that it will not pursue a criminal investigation, and – now, you demanded an investigation. So where do you stand? Tell us where – how to navigate this issue.

MR PRICE: Said, it's my understanding that your depiction is not quite right. And in fact, the army

chief prosecutor in a speech on Monday noted that the decision of a pending criminal prosecution would have to wait until the initial probe is completed. That initial probe has not yet been completed, so I'm not aware that there has been any final determination about the suitability of a criminal investigation or not.

Regardless, we have publicly condemned the killing of American-Palestinian journalist Shireen Abu Akleh in the West Bank. We continue to do so. Not only was she a close partner of ours; she was an inspiration to millions around the world. She was a dear friend to many in the U.S. Government. Her death is a great loss. It is a great tragedy for those who knew her, including my colleagues, my counterparts, but also for individuals around the world who counted on her coverage, who counted on her ability to report from the region.

We have reiterated to both Israel and to Palestinian officials our call for an investigation that is immediate, is thorough, transparent, and impartial into her killing. We do expect full accountability for those responsible for her killing. And importantly, we do expect both Israelis and Palestinians to keep us apprised of developments in their investigation and to share with us their findings. We deserve – but much more importantly, Ms. Abu Akleh's family deserves – to understand the circumstances surrounding her death.

QUESTION: Okay. Well, I mean, that's all fine, but the Palestinians are saying we don't trust the Israelis investigating themselves, almost – the Israelis are saying they want to conduct their own investigation. They insist on retrieving the bullet, which the Palestinians have, and so on. You are at a stalemate. Now the Palestinians are saying they are willing to share whatever information they have with anyone, any international body, presumably including the Americans. Would you sort of endeavor to do something like this, to work with the Palestinians on this issue on your own without the Israelis?

MR PRICE: We have urged our Palestinian and Israeli counterparts to cooperate as appropriate. Our interest is that there is a thorough, complete, immediate, transparent investigation that entails accountability. We want to see that carried out.

QUESTION: Well, you've used the word "immediate" twice now in two different responses, so what's your definition of "immediate" —

MR PRICE: Well, an investigation is ongoing, and so these investigations we know we can't prejudge.

QUESTION: Okay. So right now you're okay with the status of whatever the investigation is? Obviously, it's still in progress, but the —

MR PRICE: The investigation —

QUESTION: But it has not yet gone beyond "immediate" —

MR PRICE: The —

QUESTION: — where you would complain that it's not taking – it's taking too long?

MR PRICE: Again, we can't prejudge the conclusion of the investigations, nor can we unduly rush any investigation. Our desire is to see the investigations be completed in a comprehensive and transparent way, in a way that culminates in accountability.

QUESTION: It's my understanding that neither the Israelis nor the Palestinians have actually requested U.S. assistance in this – or whatever investigation or plural investigations are going on. Is that correct?

MR PRICE: I am not aware of any request for assistance.

QUESTION: But the Israelis have said that the U.S. could participate as an "observer," quote/unquote as an "observer." Has the U.S. taken them up on this offer?

MR PRICE: I am not aware that we have. But as you said, I am not aware of any request for assistance.

QUESTION: All right. Then I just want to ask you about another investigation. It's one that I've raised sporadically over the course of the last year or so. And that is the discovery of the swastika in the elevator. It's been 300 days now since the Secretary promised an investigation into this incident.

MR PRICE: And it's been almost 300 days since we've had an investigation. This has been an incident that has been investigated thoroughly by our Bureau of Diplomatic Security. We don't have anything to share in terms of the individual or individuals who may be responsible for this.

But the investigation was focused on attempting to determine if we could identify a culprit, a person

responsible or persons responsible, but also steps we could take to see to it that any such incidents would either be deterred or, in the event that something as horrific as this were to happen again, we would be able to identify the individual or individuals responsible in due course.

QUESTION: So was an individual or individuals identified as being responsible for this?

MR PRICE: I don't have anything further to share on —

QUESTION: Is the investigation over?

MR PRICE: The investigation is not over in the sense that if we learn information that is germane to, again, the identity of the individual or individuals behind this, of course, we will take appropriate action.

QUESTION: So, okay, but it's been 300 days, literally 301 days now. I mean, we're coming up on a full year next month – or July. Are you telling me there has been no determination of who did this at all?

MR PRICE: Matt, there is no one who would like to see —

QUESTION: I'm not asking – I'm sure you – everyone wants to know – everyone wants to get to the bottom of it. But the investigation that's been now going on for 300 days has not yet uncovered a culprit or culprits; is that correct? Is that correct?

MR PRICE: And there is no one who would like to see the perpetrator of this horrific act, this horrific graffiti, identified as much as Secretary Blinken and other members of the State Department leadership team. That is why he immediately ordered an investigation, why this investigation was launched, but importantly, why this investigation has also focused on steps we could potentially take to see to it that an incident like this does not happen again.

QUESTION: Well, but it seems to me that when you undertake an investigation like the investigation you were just talking about with Said, you want accountability for it, right? And so what you're saying is that no one has been – no one – no one person or people have been identified as doing this, so there has been no accountability for it.

MR PRICE: Matt —

QUESTION: Regardless of what you might – what steps you might take to prevent something like this from happening in the future, there hasn't been any accountability for what did happen. Is that correct?

MR PRICE: I will make the point that in order to have accountability, you have to have credible facts pointing at a specific perpetrator. In this case —

QUESTION: Okay. All right. So there isn't —

MR PRICE: In this case, I will say, as I have before, that this is a large building with many people coming through this building – some people employees, some are guests. We are focused on trying to determine if we can identify the perpetrator of this, and in some ways just as importantly, to see to it that we put measures in place so that something like this cannot happen again.

QUESTION: If I may, I have a couple more issues —

MR PRICE: Sure.

QUESTION: — to raise, if I may. Now, the Palestinians are saying they have turned whatever investigation they have, the results or the story they have, narrative they have, to the ICC. Would that be agreeable to you?

MR PRICE: As we said, we want to see a thorough investigation.

QUESTION: Okay. All right.

MR PRICE: We do not believe the ICC is an appropriate venue.

QUESTION: Okay. Now there are also a lot of other things that have happened in the last two weeks or in the last 10 days, including —

QUESTION: I'm sorry, can I just interrupt there? Why is the ICC an appropriate venue for the Ukraine —

QUESTION: Yes.

QUESTION: — the Ukraine, but not for – for the – the situation in Ukraine, but not an appropriate situation here?

MR PRICE: We believe —

QUESTION: Because it's an individual and not a collective —

MR PRICE: We believe that the ICC should maintain its focus on its core mission, and that core mission is to serve as a court of last resort —

QUESTION: For a war crime, okay. All right.

MR PRICE: — in punishing and deterring atrocity crimes.

QUESTION: So there are orders for home demolition, there are expansion of settlement, there are killing of other Palestinians, something like maybe four or five people, including maybe two or three teenagers, and so on. I don't want to go on and on lamenting, but I mean, tell us – I mean, and tell us where you stand. There is an article in the – in *Foreign Affairs* by a former U.S. official and so on, on the settlement and say – and it said that you – nobody listens to you in Israel on the expansion of settlements when you express your dissatisfaction or your disagreement, and so on.

So when will the United States take a stand – I mean a real stand – and say, "If you do this, we are going to do this?" A tit for tat. Are we likely to ever see something like this?

MR PRICE: Said, we have spoken publicly, we also have conveyed very strong messages in private, when it comes to settlement activity. And you know better than most that we have spoken out very forcefully, including in recent days, making clear our deep concern about steps that exacerbate tensions, that have the potential to move us further away towards a two-state solution. We remain committed, as successive American administrations have, to that two-state solution. We believe it's important in its own right, but also because, importantly, it would convey what is really at the heart of our policy. That is to see to it that Israelis and Palestinians alike have equal measures of security, of peace, of prosperity, of dignity. That is not something we can see until and unless there is a two-state solution to this conflict.

QUESTION: Yet we have not seen the Israelis roll back any expansion of settlements as a result of your statements, have we?

MR PRICE: Shaun.

QUESTION: If you'll allow me, switch to Latin America?

MR PRICE: Sure.

QUESTION: One more on the peace process?

QUESTION: Sure.

QUESTION: Wait, can I just do one more on Shireen before we —

MR PRICE: Sure, we'll take these two and then we'll go to Latin America. Kylie.

QUESTION: Sure. Just – so CNN came out with a new investigation just today that has evidence that Shireen was killed in a targeted attack by Israeli forces. I'm just wondering if you have a response to it and what your response is to the fact that a news outlet has been able to definitively come up with what happened here more quickly than the Israelis themselves.

MR PRICE: So on the second part of your question, Kylie, at least the coverage I have read has not portrayed this as absolutely definitive. And of course, any investigation that is conducted from afar I think would have a hard time claiming that it would be absolutely definitive. We want to see an investigation that is thorough, that is comprehensive, that ends in accountability. I don't have any comment on the allegation you just made, but it is precisely why we want to see these investigations conducted. If that is in fact the case, we would expect to see those responsible held accountable.

QUESTION: And do you view investigations like this by news outlets as something that the Israelis should take into account when they are conducting their own investigation?

MR PRICE: Just as when we conduct our reviews, when we monitor any given situation, we take into account all the various inputs. It is information that is available to us as the U.S. Government, but

also, importantly, inputs, including from open-source press reporting. Those can be quite valuable, quite insightful, quite useful. So it would be – it is our belief that they should be incorporated. That is the way we tend to operate in terms of our own reviews.

Yes.

QUESTION: Thanks.

QUESTION: On the peace process, Ned, is the U.S. talking to Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Israel and bringing Saudi Arabia to Abraham Accords? And will there be a regional summit in the region next month when the President visits the region?

MR PRICE: The White House has not announced any POTUS travel for next month. I think as you probably noticed in a recent readout between President Biden and Prime Minister Bennett, President Biden did offer that he would seek to travel to Israel in the coming months. But we haven't announced any travel formally, of course.

QUESTION: Well, it was a bit more than that. He accepted an invitation. He didn't offer to travel.

MR PRICE: He – he —

QUESTION: The prime minister invited him, and he said sure, I'll come.

MR PRICE: He indicated that he looked forward to traveling to the region in the coming months.

To your – to the broader question of normalization agreements and the Abraham Accords, we've made the point repeatedly that we welcome, we support the Abraham Accords. We welcome the normalization agreements between Israel and Arab and Muslim-majority countries. We don't have anything to announce regarding additional countries joining the accords or normalization agreements, but this has been a topic of discussion with countries around the world. And we'll continue to engage with Israel and with countries in the region – and in some cases, beyond – as we seek to expand these normalization agreements and look for additional opportunities to enhance cooperation between Israel and its neighbors – and in some cases, countries that are farther afield.

At the same time, we do not believe that normalization agreements and the Abraham Accords are a

substitute for progress when it comes to Israeli-Palestinian peace. This was a point that you heard from Secretary Blinken. You also heard from several of the ministers that took part in the Negev Summit in the Negev desert a couple of months ago in Israel. So it will be important for us to continue to seek to make progress towards a two-state solution, just as it is important for us to see if we can continue to build bridges between Israel and its neighbors and other Arab and Muslim-majority countries.

Shaun.

QUESTION: Can I go to Latin America?

MR PRICE: Sure.

QUESTION: Colombia has an election coming up shortly. Gustavo Petro, who is considered the frontrunner by many polls, has expressed concern about the conduct of the election, about the counting process, and also about his physical security, saying that from the right wing there may be threats. Do you share – you being the United States – does the United States share any concern about the elections? Are you confident that the elections will be held on time and peacefully?

MR PRICE: We are confident in Colombia's democratic institutions. Ultimately, we're not going to weigh in, of course, on the election beyond that, other than to note this will be a decision for the Colombian people.

QUESTION: Could I actually just jump completely to a different region, to Ethiopia?

MR PRICE: Sure.

QUESTION: There was – there has been a round-up, according to various reporting, in Amhara of particularly people in the media but also of others. Just last weekend, the Secretary was discussing – saying that there had been some progress in Ethiopia. How concerned are you about this and what it means for the –

MR PRICE: Well, there has been progress. There's been important progress in terms of the humanitarian truce that has allowed additional provision of humanitarian aid into the Afar Region. Some – it is still not at a point where the humanitarian aid that is flowing in is able to meet the

requirement, but we have seen an influx and we hope to build on that by sustaining the ceasefire and continuing to work with our partners on the ground to see to it that that humanitarian aid continues to flow into the region.

You are correct, though, at the same time we are concerned, deeply concerned about the narrowing space for freedom of expression and independent media in Ethiopia, including a troubling increase in reports of harassment, detention, arrests of journalists, media professionals, and activists. We strongly urge the Government of Ethiopia and regional authorities to uphold the rule of law and provide all applicable procedural safeguards for any individual arrested. We also urge the protection of press freedom online and offline, and for the safety of all persons advocating for their rights.

Humeyra.

QUESTION: Just one thing on Quad and India. So there was no mention of Russia or Russian, both of – neither of those words in the joint Quad statement. Do you know why it was left out? Was that a concession to India?

MR PRICE: Obviously, we don't speak to the diplomacy that goes into joint statements, but we have heard from countries around the world, including from the Quad, the importance of key concepts like territorial integrity, sovereignty, the idea of a free and open Indo-Pacific in which the rules of the road are adhered to and respected. Those rules of the road that apply in the Indo-Pacific of course apply equally in other regions as well, including in Europe. And so you've heard our fellow Quad counterparts speak to the importance of upholding and respecting those principles around the world.

QUESTION: Does it bother you guys that whenever India is in these groupings, that you guys seem to fail to put out a strong statement when it comes to Russia? And in other venues, other groupings, you guys do make an effort to call out Russia as the invader. Do you have any worries that that might weaken Quad?

MR PRICE: We talked about this quite a bit in the context of the 2+2 that we had with our Indian counterparts a number of weeks ago now here at the department with Secretary Austin and Secretary Blinken and their Indian counterparts. We made the point then that India has a relationship with Russia that has developed over the course of decades. What we have seen Russia

perpetrate in Ukraine is something that has now transpired over the course of three months. And of course, our focus and our concern for potential Russian aggression against Ukraine only extends to the past six or so months.

So we have never thought it realistic or possible to attempt to refashion or recontour a historic relationship that India has had with Russia that has developed over the course of decades in days, weeks, or even months. But the United States is now in a position owing to a bipartisan legacy that goes back to the administration of George W. Bush to be a partner for India that we were not able to be when Russia's – excuse me, when India's relationship with Russia first developed during the Cold War. The United States is now a partner of choice for India when it comes to – when it comes to economics, when it comes to trade, and yes, when it comes to security.

We were not able to be that partner of choice before, but we have been gratified by our ability to deepen those links between our economies, between our peoples, between our militaries, and we are confident that those ties will strengthen going forward as well.

QUESTION: Anything on Turkey?

MR PRICE: Sure.

QUESTION: Very quickly. Apparently, Turkey announced the plans or it's been reported that Turkey plans to establish a security zone in Syria, and that –

MR PRICE: We've talked about that.

QUESTION: Oh, you did?

MR PRICE: We did. Let me – someone I haven't called on. Yes.

QUESTION: Lebanon?

MR PRICE: Yes, please.

QUESTION: Have any State Department officials met with Lebanon's security chief Abbas Ibrahim during his visit this week? And if so, was there a discussion of Americans missing in Syria?

MR PRICE: I am not aware of any department engagement with him, but we will let you know if there has been a meeting.

Yes.

QUESTION: Thank you so much, sir. Secretary Blinken met with Pakistani Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari in New York. And after that meeting, Bilawal Bhutto talked about Pakistan economy, which is in crisis right now.

Sir, does U.S. plan to do something to stabilize it? I mean, is U.S. helping Pakistan in forthcoming talks with IMF that might help strengthen the Pakistani economy?

MR PRICE: I'm sorry, repeat that once more?

QUESTION: So is U.S. helping Pakistan in the forthcoming talks with IMF?

MR PRICE: There was a discussion of Pakistan's economic standing. Again, I wouldn't want to go into the details of that. But of course, our relationship with Pakistan is multifaceted. We have important ties across a number of arenas, including our economic ties. We want to see Pakistan on stable and advantageous economic footing, and we'll continue to work with our Pakistani partners to help achieve that.

QUESTION: Sir, new ambassador to Pakistan, Donald Blome, reach Islamabad, and he talk about building strong relationship with Pakistan. Sir, is he open to meet any political party, like Imran Khan's PTI, who is spreading anti-American sentiments in Pakistan?

MR PRICE: Our ambassadors around the world not only engage with their government counterparts, but tend to meet with and listen to a range of stakeholders, including stakeholders from the opposition, including stakeholders from the business community and stakeholders from civil society. So I wouldn't want to speak to any potential meetings, but we do make it a point around the world to meet with and hear from a diversity of voices and perspectives.

Yes.

QUESTION: Yeah. On Iran. What's behind the profound silence in Washington regarding the talks

with Iran and the nuclear agreement? And if you have any comment on the assassination of the IRGC officer in Tehran last weekend?

MR PRICE: I don't know that I would characterize it as a profound silence, because I am frequently asked —

QUESTION: Not profound, just silent. (Laughter.)

MR PRICE: I am frequently asked most days I'm up here for —

QUESTION: But there's no statement; there's no update on the talks.

MR PRICE: Well, as soon as we have something to update, if and when we have an update that we're able to share, we will. The update that I relayed last week is precisely where we are now. We continue to believe that a mutual return to compliance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action is profoundly in our national security interest. That is why we remain open to testing the proposition that we can potentially get back to the JCPOA.

That remains our position. We know it remains the position of our European allies, our other partners, that the JCPOA provides the most appropriate solution to what has become a very serious nonproliferation challenge. As Iran has been unshackled from its nuclear commitments, as it has — as its nuclear program has galloped forward in ways that are deeply concerning to us, it is not only the United States, it's our European allies, it's our other partners that continue to wish to see those nuclear constraints reimposed on Iran so that it is, once again, permanently and verifiably prohibited from ever obtaining a nuclear weapon. That is the potential return to compliance. It is something we continue to see if it might be possible.

Yes.

QUESTION: And on the assassination of the IRGC officer in Tehran?

MR PRICE: We've seen the reports. The only thing I'll say is that we had no involvement in the killing, of course.

Yes.

QUESTION: Thank you, Ned. Sweden and Finland are sending their delegations to Turkey tomorrow. Now that Turkey has published its demands, do you think we have better understanding of both sides' differences? And what do you expect from tomorrow's talks? And I have second question on Armenia.

MR PRICE: Well, as you said, our Swedish and Finnish partners are going to – and have been – discussing this with our Turkish allies. I am hesitant to weigh in here, precisely because this is not a bilateral issue between the United States and Turkey. This is currently an issue between Turkey and our Swedish and Finnish partners. I will only add that in following our engagements with our Swedish and Finnish partners and engagements with our Turkish allies as well, we do remain confident that we'll be able to maintain and preserve the strong consensus within the NATO Alliance for a swift accession of Sweden and Finland.

QUESTION: Thank you. A second question —

QUESTION: Could I go back to your last answer on the IRGC?

MR PRICE: Sure.

QUESTION: You said – I think you said we had no involvement in this killing, comma, of course. Where does this "of course" come from? It's not like the United States hasn't assassinated IRGC officials in the past. I recall the previous administration actually boasted about how they took out an IRGC – the IRGC commander. So why is this "of course"? And why are you denying it? No one even asked you if you were responsible for it.

MR PRICE: Well, we were asked for a comment, so I provided a comment.

QUESTION: Well, okay. But you don't – so that's your only comment, is that we had nothing to do with it?

MR PRICE: That's our only comment, correct.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MR PRICE: Yes.

QUESTION: On Armenia, heard that there was a phone call between the Secretary and Armenian prime minister today. I haven't seen the State Department's readout yet. But did the Secretary have a chance to discuss last weekend's dialogue and what is his take out of the results?

MR PRICE: So I expect we will have a readout to offer later today, but the Secretary did have an opportunity to speak with the Armenian prime minister. They discussed the positive momentum that we've seen in recent days, in recent weeks in the South Caucasus. The Secretary spoke of the fact that we stand ready to assist with border delimitation and demarcation efforts. He encouraged continued progress to develop regional transportation and communication links. The Secretary went on to highlight the importance of continued bilateral dialogue to solve the challenges in this region. He reaffirmed our support for, as you alluded to, the EU-brokered conversations between President Aliyev and Prime Minister Pashinyan. He also reaffirmed, as you've heard from me and from others, our readiness to engage through – bilaterally and through our role as a co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group to help Armenia and Azerbaijan find a long-term and comprehensive peace.

QUESTION: New topic?

MR PRICE: Yes.

QUESTION: Sir, the current Government of Pakistan has started arresting and administering cases against some journalists who are critical – a few of my colleagues, Sabir Shakir, Arshad Sharif, who are also been booked. Sir, Secretary Blinken spoke about the freedom of speech in Pakistan like a few weeks ago in Foreign Press Center. So would you like to share your concerns on that?

MR PRICE: Secretary Blinken did share our perspective of freedom of the press, media freedom around the world. He was specifically asked about media freedom in Pakistan. He made the point that journalists, those in the media industry, should never have their voices suppressed, they should never be subject to suppression or repression solely because of the important work they are doing to shine a light on events around the world. So it's important to us that countries around the world respect the right of freedom of expression, freedom of the press, whether that is in Pakistan, whether that is in any other country.

QUESTION: Sir, after the meeting of President Biden with Indian Prime Minister Modi, Indian media claimed that U.S. President Joe Biden and PM Modi reached substantive outcomes regarding situation in Ukraine. Can you please tell me something about – more about that? What kind of

substantive outcomes about Ukraine?

MR PRICE: I would need to refer you to the White House for that question.

QUESTION: Thank you.

MR PRICE: Thank you very much.

QUESTION: Wait, Ned. Since Friday —

MR PRICE: Yes.

QUESTION: This has to do with American citizens detained in Russia.

MR PRICE: Yes.

QUESTION: I just want to know if there's any – if there are any updates since Friday's update on consular access or anything else with Brittney Griner or Paul Whelan.

MR PRICE: There is nothing that we're in a position to share since Friday. We did note that a consular official from our embassy in Moscow was able to visit with Brittney Griner on the margins of her court hearing in Moscow that day. We have made the point that one-off consular visits are in our view not sufficient, but it's not only in our view. It is in the requirements that are put forward by the Vienna Convention and other bilateral agreements that stipulate that we should have regular, sustained access to Americans who are held in detention around the world, including to those in pretrial detention.

QUESTION: So —

QUESTION: Okay, and did —

QUESTION: I wanted to ask about Austin Tice, anything new. Are you —

QUESTION: Well, that kind of already kind of came up with the (inaudible).

MR PRICE: I'm sorry.

QUESTION: Go ahead.

QUESTION: Quick – no, I wanted to ask – sorry – I wanted to ask about Austin Tice. Are you guys involved in any kind of direct or indirect negotiation to pursue his release if he is still alive and held captive?

MR PRICE: Austin Tice is someone who is constantly on our minds. He is someone who has spent about a quarter of his life in prison. I believe within the next couple of months he will mark a grim milestone, having spent 10 years separated from his family. He recently, as I recall, celebrated his 40th birthday. We are and we will continue to do everything we can to see his release, his safe release, his return to his family, as soon as we can. Of course, whether it's the case of Austin Tice, whether it is the case of Americans who have been reunited with their families, you know that we tend not to speak of these – speak of our efforts in public before Americans come home so as not to jeopardize our efforts precisely to bring them home.

But our special presidential envoy for hostage affairs, Secretary Blinken, they are deeply engaged on this case. They are deeply engaged on all cases of Americans who are wrongfully detained, Americans who are held hostage overseas. They have no higher priority than to see the safe return of these Americans to their families.

QUESTION: Did you have any comment on Tedros being re-elected to the head of WHO? And given the fact that they still have not invited Taiwan to attend the WHA, I'm wondering if you have anything to say about that and his leadership of this group.

MR PRICE: I do. So we – of course, we congratulate Dr. Tedros on his re-election as the WHO director general. We look forward to working with him to make real progress on reform at the WHO, to improve the organization's agility, its transparency, its accountability. We strongly support ongoing efforts to strengthen the WHO and to make it more agile, transparent, and efficient as an essential centerpiece and convener in the global health architecture. And we appreciate the steps the director general has taken, such as his transformation agenda, to help the organization reach its potential, to promote universal health coverage and healthier populations, and to respond to health emergencies, especially in conflict areas, as we have seen most recently in Ukraine, where Russia's brutal invasion has created a real health emergency.

We acknowledge, of course, that there still remains much work to do, and we remain committed to

working with the director general and the organization to reform and modernize the World Health Organization so it is more transparent, more effective, more sustainably financed, and more agile.

QUESTION: So you don't have concerns that he might be too influenced by China?

MR PRICE: We are committed to continuing to pursue the reform agenda at the WHO to see to it that it can meet the growing needs of the global population.

Yes.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: One final thing, Ned. Politico has reported that President Biden has decided to keep Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps on the list of Foreign Terrorist Organization, and a senior Western official saying that the decision is absolutely final and the window for Iranian concessions has closed. Do you have any comment on this?

MR PRICE: We've been asked this question repeatedly over the course of recent weeks. We have not weighed in, and I'll continue to toe that line. Of course, we want to see a mutual return to compliance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, as I said before, because it would be manifestly in the national security interest of the United States.

Now, the precise dynamics of potential sanctions lifting that would go along with it, that has been a subject of discussions with our Iranian counterparts by way of our European allies and other partners in Vienna, just as the nuclear steps that Iran would need to take if it were to decide to resume full compliance with the JCPOA have also been a topic of discussion. The discussions in Vienna, the negotiations in Vienna have been solely focused on the nuclear issue. If Iran were to seek to discuss issues that are extraneous to the JCPOA, to the nuclear agreement itself, that is an – that is a discussion we are prepared to have, but, of course, Iran would have to make concessions of its own.

Thank you all very much.

QUESTION: Thank you.

(The briefing was concluded at 3:17 p.m.)

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1. Politburo Member Yang Jiechi [↑](#)

[Department Press Briefing – May 20, 2022](#)

MR PRICE: Good afternoon, everyone. Beyond preemptively apologizing for the limited time I'll have with you today, I don't have anything at the top beyond wishing everyone a Happy Friday, and we'll turn to your questions.

Operator, do you mind repeating the instructions to ask a question?

OPERATOR: Yes, and once more, as a reminder, ladies and gentlemen, if you do have a question, please press 1 then 0 on your touchtone phone.

MR PRICE: We'll go to the line of Tracy Wilkinson.

QUESTION: Hi, thank you. My question is about the Summit of the Americas. Ned, you a week or so ago said that once the invitations went out, you would have more to say. And now that the invitations have gone out as of Wednesday, could you talk a little bit about this – what appears to be a widening threat to boycott, what it says about the U.S. role and influence in this hemisphere that it can't get everybody to a summit, and then the wider criticism that we're hearing about the organization being chaotic and that it's taken this long to get the list together – the invitation list together, this long – the agenda is still vague. Some people are saying the U.S. is sort of missing an opportunity here to really make a splash on its – on the U.S. – Biden administration's policy towards Latin America. Thanks.

MR PRICE: Thanks, Tracy. Lots of assertions there, not many of which I would agree with, but let me start with this: The first tranche of invitations for the summit did go out yesterday. As is standard in the case of summits, we're still considering additional invites and we'll share the final list of invites once all invitations have gone out. We certainly understand the speculation you alluded to about who will receive an invite or who will attend – that's understandable. It's understandable in part because this would be the first since – summit of this sort since its inauguration in 1994 that we've been able to serve as host, and the first time since 2015 that a U.S. president will participate.

We'll plan to work through a variety of questions by engaging directly with the countries of the region. The President has engaged with his counterparts; the Secretary has had a number of calls with his counterparts as well. He's also engaged with special advisor for the summit, former Senator Chris Dodd. He has been traveling throughout the hemisphere, and also speaking with leaders from the region.

For the summit itself, our agenda is to focus on working together when it comes to the core challenges that face our hemisphere, that face our neighbors. We're a region that's still recovering from COVID-19. We're a region that has endured economic shocks that are generating unprecedented levels of migration – not just to the United States, but also to Mexico and Central America. We'll talk about shared challenges like climate change as well.

So, there's a lot to talk about. We are confident that there will be robust participation. We're confident that the summit will bring together thousands of people to focus on some of the most important and, again, shared challenges and opportunity – opportunities that face our hemisphere. In addition to heads of state and representatives of government, we also look forward to welcoming civil society stakeholders, young leaders, CEOs, business leaders from across the hemisphere, making this summit the most inclusive to date.

With that, why don't we go to Shaun Tandon, please.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) doing this. If you don't mind, I'll try to be brief on a couple of different unrelated things. North Korea – the administration has been saying for a number of days now that there's a risk of a nuclear test. Do you have anything new on that? Is there anything new in the messaging you might have to North Korea about repercussions, if any, if they go ahead with this?

On China, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet is – has confirmed a trip next week to China. Civil rights groups are critical of this, saying she could be seeing a Potemkin village. What – does the United States have an assessment of whether the trip is appropriate at this point, whether be useful, whether the Chinese will be giving access?

And just finally, briefly, Brittney Griner – I was wondering if there's any update. I know the Secretary spoke to her wife recently. Do you have any more updates on the case there? Thank you.

MR PRICE: Sure, let me start with that last question first. I do have an update to offer. I can confirm

that a consular officer visited Brittney Griner in detention yesterday, on Thursday, May 19th. The consular officer found her continuing to do as well as could be expected under these exceedingly challenging circumstances. But again, our message is a clear and simple one. We continue to insist that Russia allow consistent and timely consular access to all U.S. citizen detainees. One-off visits are not sufficient, and we will continue to call on Moscow to uphold its commitments under the Vienna Convention for consistent and timely access as well.

When it comes to China and the visit of High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet to the PRC, what I'll say is that we are deeply concerned about the upcoming visit. Our understanding of the planned restrictions that she will be subjected to during the visit – based on that, we have no expectation that the PRC will grant the necessary access required to conduct a complete, unmanipulated assessment of the human rights environment in Xinjiang. The high commissioner, we believe, must act, and be allowed to act, independently; and the high commissioner must report objectively and factually on the human rights situation.

A credible visit to the region would feature unhindered, transparent, and unsupervised access to affected communities of the high commissioner's choosing, as well as timely, candid, and complete reporting of the visit's full findings. We have repeatedly made our concerns known to the PRC and to the high commissioner, and for months we and others in the international community have called upon the high commissioner to release a report drafted by her staff detailing the situation in Xinjiang. Despite frequent assurances by her office that the report would be released in short order, it remains unavailable to us, and we call on the high commissioner to release the report without delay and not to wait for the visit to do so.

The high commissioner's continued silence in the face of indisputable evidence of atrocities in Xinjiang and other human rights violations and abuses throughout the PRC, it is deeply concerning, particularly as she is and should be the leading UN voice on human rights. The United States remains gravely concerned by the genocide and crimes against humanity that PRC authorities are perpetrating against Uyghurs, who are predominantly Muslim, and members of other ethnic and religious minority groups in Xinjiang. And we call on the PRC to immediately cease committing these atrocities, release those unjustly detained, and allow independent investigators full and unhindered access to the region. We'll continue to work closely with our likeminded partners and the international community to urge an end to these atrocities and provide justice to the many victims.

When it comes to the DPRK, we've spoken for several weeks now about our concerns for additional provocations. We've seen multiple tests of ICBM systems. We've seen additional tests of ballistic missile technology. We remain concerned that the DPRK may attempt to undertake another provocation during the course of the President's visit to Northeast Asia or in the days following. That could include an – another ICBM test. That could include a test of a nuclear weapon. Of course, the President is in the region. He is in the region to send a message of solidarity with our partners, to send a message that the United States is there and will be there for our allies and partners to provide deterrence, to provide defense for our treaty allies in the region – of course, the ROK and Japan, both of which the President will have an opportunity to visit in the coming days – and to make very clear that we'll respond decisively to any threats and any aggression. And, of course, our cooperation bilaterally – and in the case of the ROK and Japan, trilateral – is an essential ingredient to the way in which we will approach – what are shared security concerns in the region and beyond.

With that, let's go to Missy Ryan, please.

QUESTION: Hi. Not sure if you guys can hear me or if you have to unmute to be unmuted, but just wondering, Ned, if you could give us an update on the discussions in NATO about the ongoing troop presence in Eastern Europe. There was a record today from CNN that's saying that there would be a ongoing presence of 100,000 troops in Europe. And that is something that – that seems like it would be something as – sort of a forerunner to the decisions that are going to be locked in or out in Madrid. Any comment on that would be helpful. Thanks.

MR PRICE: Missy, I'm confident these discussions will continue, especially as we look forward to the NATO Summit in Madrid next month. These are conversations that we've been having within Alliance both since and before President Putin's decision to further invade Ukraine on February 24th.

Before that invasion, we were clear that we would do a few things if President Putin's aggression went ahead. We made clear that we would provide unprecedented levels of security assistance to support our Ukrainian partners so that they could effectively defend their freedom, defend their democracy, defend their country from what was then the potential of Russian aggression. We made clear that we would impose severe consequences on the Russian economy, on the Russian financial system. But to your question, we also said that we would reinforce and take steps to reassure the Alliance, the member states of the Alliance, and particularly those on the eastern flank of the NATO

Alliance, and that's what we've done.

We have – there are now some 100,000 U.S. service members on the European continent. That number has risen in recent weeks precisely because we are fulfilling the pledge that we made prior to Russian – prior to Russia's invasion. But we will continue to speak to questions of force posture, both in terms of NATO forces and in terms of U.S. deployment as an alliance and bilaterally and multilaterally with our Allies and partners in Europe, in the weeks ahead – especially as we look towards the summit in June.

Let's go to Alex Raufoglu of Turan.

QUESTION: Thank you, Ned. Happy Friday. I have two questions, one on Russia. Russia's supply of natural gas to Finland will be cut tomorrow morning, both Finnish and Russian energy companies confirmed today. Can I get your reaction to this latest attempt of Kremlin's wielding natural gas flows as a weapon and its implications, if possible, for the region?

And secondly on Armenia and Azerbaijan, Prime Minister Pashinyan and President Aliyev will be in Brussels this weekend and they're going to meet for the third time since last December. What is your expectation of the current ongoing negotiations process? Thanks so much.

MR PRICE: Thank you very much. I think you put it well in your first question. You said Russia's latest attempt to weaponize energy, and the fact is that this is not the first time Russia has attempted to weaponize energy. What we are doing is to work with our allies and partners to see to it that, going forward, Russia won't be able to do this in a way that holds hostage countries in the region and around the world who have a reliance on Russian energy sources. So, in many ways, what we're seeing from Russia is not surprising precisely because they have done this before. They have done this before, in the context of Ukraine in 2014; they have done this before in the context of Ukraine, more recently; and of course, we've seen them make these threats and follow through with actions in the aftermath of Russia's further invasion of Ukraine on February 24th.

Since Russia's invasion, actually well before Russia's invasion, we began working very closely – as I mentioned before, with our allies and partners around the world, including those partners in Europe that are reliant on Russian energy. And we've done this with two timeframes in mind. In the short term, we have sought to ensure that there is adequate energy supply available to our allies and partners, in part by tapping various strategic petroleum reserves – our own, a million barrels a

day over the course of six months is what President Biden has committed to; other allies and partners around the world are doing the same. We're working with those same partners to see to it that energy is shipped and available to countries that may find themselves vulnerable to Russia's manipulation in the near term.

Of course, this is not only a near-term challenge. There is a longer-term dimension to this as well, and our goal is to see to it that countries in Europe and countries well beyond, including countries that have been reliant on Russian energy for decades, are and will be in a position to lessen that reliance over time. In the case of Europe, in the aftermath of President Biden's visit to Brussels last summer, we established with our European Union counterpart, the U.S.-EU Energy Council, to discuss these very issues, how we can work together to see to it that in the years to come Russia is not able to use energy as a weapon in the same way.

Let's go to Humeyra Pamuk, please.

Oh, I'm sorry, I – you asked a second question about Armenia and Azerbaijan. Before we go to Humeyra, let me just spend a moment on that.

We very much welcome the dialogue between Armenia and Azerbaijan. We remain committed to promoting a peaceful, democratic, and prosperous future for the South Caucasus region as part of that. We do urge this dialogue to continue and for the parties to intensify their diplomatic engagements to make use of existing mechanisms for direct engagement, and in an effort to find comprehensive solutions to all outstanding issues related to and resulting from the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and – to normalize their relations through the conclusion – excuse me – conclusion of a comprehensive peace agreement. We are there to support this process. We remain ready to assist Armenia and Azerbaijan with these efforts, including in our capacity as a co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group.

We'll go to Humeyra Pamuk, please.

QUESTION: A question on the NATO issue. While the dispute is officially between Turkey, Sweden, and Finland, American officials have said if there is anything they can do to be supportive, they'll do it. And it's no secret that Turkey has a number of asks from Washington. I'm wondering if the U.S. is willing to entertain any of these to solve this issue. Some of those would be expediting the F-16 sale or expediting the smaller F-16 package, or lifting any of the S-400-related sanctions. Basically, if

there is anything you're prepared to do beyond expressing your support and having consultations with Turkey.

Second question is: Israel said they're holding an operational inquiry into the killing of Palestinian-American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, but they're not launching a criminal probe for now. Is the United States satisfied with that? Can you say if the Biden administration is committed to making sure that there will be accountability for her killing? Thanks.

MR PRICE: Thanks, Humeyra. On your first question, you raised a series of bilateral topics of conversation and potential topics of conversation between the United States and Turkey. The question of Turkey's approach to the NATO accession of Finland and Sweden, that is not a bilateral question between the United States and Turkey; that is a question before Turkey as a member of the NATO Alliance, and between and among Turkey and other members of the NATO Alliance.

For our part, you heard President Biden say this yesterday when he greeted his Swedish and Finnish counterparts at the White House. You heard Secretary Blinken make this same point in Berlin last week when he attended the NATO ministerial. But we strongly support NATO's "Open Door" policy, the right of each country to decide its own future, its foreign policy, its security arrangements. And when it comes to Sweden and Finland, two countries that have now made that decision for themselves, we are proud to offer the strong support of the United States for their applications.

The President yesterday called them two great democracies, two close, highly capable partners to join the strongest, most powerful, defensive Alliance in the history of the world. These are countries that have been longstanding partners of the United States in terms of security, in terms of our economic integration, in terms of the important ties that bind us to the region as well.

As you know, we did have an opportunity to meet with – Secretary Blinken had an opportunity to meet with his Turkish counterpart yesterday in New York City. Turkey is a longstanding, valued NATO Ally. We understand Turkey's longstanding concerns, and will continue to work together in our efforts to end the scourge of terrorism. For their part, Finland and Sweden are working directly with Turkey. But we're also talking to Turkey about this issue. Yesterday the Secretary had a good, constructive conversation with Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu. I'm not going to go into the full details of that engagement, beyond saying that we remain confident that Turkey's concerns will be addressed and that we'll be able to reach consensus as an Alliance on the accession process for Finland and Sweden. We've heard strong allied support for their applications, and we look forward to quickly

bringing them into the strongest defensive Alliance in history.

Finally, on your question into – regarding the investigation on the killing of Shireen Abu Akleh, we reiterate the administration's call for a thorough and transparent investigation to determine the circumstances of her killing. Investigating attacks on independent media and prosecuting those responsible are of paramount importance. We urge countries around the world to pursue accountability for attacks on journalists anywhere. And we'll continue to promote media freedom and to protect journalists' ability to do their jobs without fear of violence, threats to their lives or safety, or unjust detention. So again, we've been clear that there must be a transparent and credible investigation of Ms. **Abu Akleh**'s killing, and that any such investigation must include accountability.

Let's go to the line of Laura Kelly, please.

QUESTION: How concerned is the U.S. over Turkish military flights over Greek islands, and how do those actions impact NATO's stability?

And if I could ask a second question, the Anti-Corruption Foundation headed by Aleksey Navalny has compiled a list of 6,000 Russians that it wants the U.S. and allies to sanction in response to Russia's war in Ukraine. Are you aware of this list they have compiled, and is it likely to be considered for another round of sanctions against Russia?

Thank you.

MR PRICE: Thank you very much. So, on your second question, Mr. Navalny's organization has consistently put forward proposals. We take a look at – we take a look at what we receive and information available to us, but also information that is available in the public realm. We very much appreciate the efforts on the part of organizations, like Mr. Navalny's, to shine a spotlight on corruption, to shine a spotlight on injustice, to shine a spotlight on repression in Russia and around the world. And so, of course, we will take a very close look at what they have put forward as we continue to hold to account the Russian Federation for its invasion of Ukraine, for its human rights abuses, for corruption, and other offenses when it comes to Russia's conduct.

On your first question on Turkish overflights, we encourage all countries to respect the sovereign airspace of other countries and to operate state aircraft with due regard for the safety of navigation of civil aircraft. Where disagreements exist over the limits of a country's territorial airspace, we urge

coordination and discussion, not provocative actions that could lead to deadly accidents. As a matter of principle, we encourage all states to resolve maritime delimitation issues peacefully and in accordance with international law.

Let's go to Cindy Saine.

OPERATOR: I don't show Cindy on any longer. Please, go ahead.

MR PRICE: Okay. Let's go to Joseph Haboush, please.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) to ask, over the last week we've seen the Secretary of Defense speak to his Russian counterpart, and then I believe yesterday we saw General Milley also speak with his Russian counterpart. Are there any plans or is there any will to have a conversation between Secretary Blinken and his counterpart Lavrov? Is there – or are there any updates on the U.S. trying to open a line of communication there? Thank you.

MR PRICE: Thanks, Joseph. So, we discussed this earlier this week in the last briefing, so let me briefly recap. As you know, prior to the February 24th Russian invasion of Ukraine, Secretary Blinken was at the forefront of the effort to attempt to forestall what may well have been an inevitability the whole time. But Secretary Blinken traveled around the world, met with his Russian counterpart. Deputy Secretary Sherman met with her Russian counterpart. Both of them took part in phone calls in an effort to prevent what has since taken place.

We have demonstrated time and again that we believe in the power of dialogue and the effectiveness and the usefulness of open lines of communication. But we also believe that there needs to be the potential for any such engagement to have a constructive outcome and to advance the ultimate and overriding objective. And of course, in this case the ultimate and overriding objective is a diminution of violence in Ukraine leading an end to this brutal war of aggression – a brutal war of choice, against the people, the government, and the state of Ukraine.

It is, in our assessment, not the time at the moment for a high-level call between Secretary Blinken or other seniors at the department precisely because we have seen no indication just yet that the Russians are serious about engaging in a constructive dialogue that could help to advance the prospects for a diminution of the violence or ultimately putting this conflict to an end. If we feel that a conversation has the potential to do that, has the potential to save lives, of course we won't

hesitate to do that.

In the meantime, I don't have to tell you because you've seen the readouts. You've seen our travel around the world, including to be with our allies and partners in Europe that the Secretary has been leading the diplomatic effort to provide support to our Ukrainian partners, to provide security assistance to them, to provide economic assistance to them, and to provide humanitarian assistance to the Ukrainian people. He's been leading the effort to hold Russia to account for its actions in Ukraine and its actions against its own people, and he will continue to engage with our allies and partners, including as we look to the Madrid summit next month to convene the NATO Allies.

We'll go to Kylie Atwood, please.

QUESTION: Hi, Ned. Thanks for doing this. Quick question on a report yesterday from *The Wall Street Journal* about the Biden administration weighing the possibility of waiving Belarus potash sanctions to get Lukashenko to allow a corridor from Ukraine to Lithuania to get that grain out of Ukraine. I know you guys don't preview sanctions, or sanctions relief for that matter. But would the administration consider any form of sanctions relief if Russia, or Belarus for that matter, were to come to some sort of agreement to essentially entice them to get this grain out of the country?

And then my second question is just a bit of a throwback here, something we haven't talked about in a while, but the State Department concluded their Afghanistan withdrawal review, as I understand it, back in March or April. And I'm just wondering when the State Department plans to present those findings, at least the unclassified portion of it, speaking to kind of transparency and the fact that you guys said you would reflect upon the lessons that could be learned. Thank you.

MR PRICE: Thanks, Kylie. So on your first question, of course, we had an opportunity over the past couple days in New York City to discuss the issue of food security and food insecurity owing to longer-term challenges like climate change, but also owing to in many cases what is the proximate cause of food scarcity and the rise in commodity prices, and that is Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

It is very simply that the Government of Russia, using food as a weapon in this case by blocking the exports – the export of foodstuffs from Ukraine's ports, the Kremlin has sought to deflect responsibility for its actions by blaming sanctions for disruptions to the global food system. This is

patently false. Our sanctions on Russia specifically exclude food and fertilizer.

On the other hand, it is very clear that it is President Putin's unjustified, his unprovoked, his brutal war against Ukraine that has put millions around the globe at risk of food insecurity and whose effects are felt thousands of miles away by many of the world's most vulnerable citizens. And so when we think about what would be the most effective means by which to alleviate the challenge of food insecurity, of course, that would be for the Kremlin to end this senseless war; to see them let farmers safely plant, harvest, tend to their fields; to let ships loaded with essential food commodities and related goods to sail freely; and essentially, to stop weaponizing the flow of food and foodstuffs from Ukraine and from Ukraine's ports.

In terms of the broader issue, no country has done more than the United States to seek to address that, and Secretary Blinken was able to convene dozens of high-level officials, including many of his counterparts, on Wednesday and Thursday of this week in the UN General Assembly but also in the Security Council to discuss this very issue. This is something that the UN secretary-general has focused on as well. We support his efforts to persuade Russia to end its unprovoked, unjustified war, and his efforts to see to it that Ukraine is able to export its agricultural products unhindered to once again help feed the world.

When it comes to Belarus, we sanctioned Belarusian state-owned potash producer Belaruskali and its primary exporting arm in coordination with our transatlantic allies in 2020. This was to impose costs on the Lukashenka regime following the fraudulent 2020 elections and the regime's ensuing crackdown on peaceful protests and human rights – peaceful protests and human rights and fundamental freedoms. It is the Lukashenka regime that uses these state-owned enterprises to enrich and to sustain its repressive regime. And until the regime ends its support for Russia's unprovoked aggression against Ukraine, we'll continue to take all appropriate actions to disrupt its military's – its military and financial capabilities through targeted sanctions, including the actions taken against Russia.

So as you alluded to at the top, we don't preview potential upcoming actions, but sanctions will remain a key tool in our efforts to address global security concerns as well as human rights abuses in Belarus and other areas of concern for the United States.

On Afghanistan, you are right that we did launch a review, an after-action review, covering the couple years before the military withdrawal from Afghanistan late last year. We are reviewing the

findings of that review, and we'll let you know when we're at a point to potentially say more on that front.

We have time for one final question. Let's go to Ali Harb.

OPERATOR: At this time, I don't show Ali Harb in queue.

MR PRICE: Okay, let's go to the line of Shannon Crawford.

QUESTION: Thanks so much. Just a quick question about the family of Paul Whelan. They've put out a statement saying that State Department representatives have told them they need to make more noise or be a squeaker wheel to get the attention of the administration, or perhaps to prove that Paul's case deserves action. Can you comment on this?

MR PRICE: Thank you for the question. We know that each of these cases deserve action, and we are taking action in each and every one of these cases. It is accurate, it is true, that we don't often speak publicly to what we're doing behind the scenes, but Secretary Blinken is committed to seeing to it that this department, including the office of our special envoy – special presidential envoy for hostage affairs, is doing everything we potentially can to see the safe and effective release of Americans who are unjustly or wrongfully detained or held hostage around the world.

We remain in regular contact with the families of those held hostage or wrongfully detained. We are absolutely grateful for their partnership and feedback, and we continue to work to ensure that we're communicating and sharing information in a way that is useful to families. One of the most vital sources of information to us is that communication with the families. There is no one that knows the context, that knows the background, that knows the history of any particular case better than the families and the loved ones of those who are held hostage or wrongfully detained around the world. It's why it's so vitally important to us that we continue that coordination and that communication, even as we are often taking steps that we don't speak to publicly to ensure that we are doing everything we can to effect the safe release of Americans who are wrongfully detained or held hostage.

Thank you very much, everyone. We will see you back at the department next week. In the meantime, have a good weekend.

(The briefing was concluded at 2:28 p.m.)

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[Department Press Briefing – May 17, 2022](#)

2:32 p.m. EDT

MR PRICE: Good afternoon, everyone, and I apologize for the late start. And if you will indulge me, we have a few items to get through at the top.

Today on the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Interphobia, and Transphobia – IDAHOBIT – we affirm that the promotion and protection of human rights of LGBTQI+ persons is a foreign policy priority. We emphasize that the human rights of LGBTQI+ persons are just that: human rights to which all persons are entitled, as made eminently clear in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which provides in its first Article that “[a]ll human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” Regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sex characteristics, everyone deserves to live with respect, dignity, and safety.

The United States commits to doing our part to promote and advance the human rights of LGBTQI+ persons globally and to end discrimination and violence against LGBTQI+ persons. We will capitalize on commitments made during President Biden's Summit for Democracy and the Year of Action to encourage positive reforms. Together with inclusive democracies, multilateral institutions, and civil society organizations around the world, we will continue to work toward a world where no one lives in fear because of who they are or whom they love.

This week we marked the occasion of Vesak Day, joining Buddhists around the world in celebration of a day honoring the life, legacy, and teachings of Buddha. This occasion also provides us with an opportunity to acknowledge the contributions of Buddhist communities around the world, communities that have helped to build a better world for people of all faith traditions. Let us all recommit ourselves to upholding the timeless values of tolerance, compassion, and respect that are imbued in the Buddhist faith.

Happy Buddha Purnima.

Next, the international community has witnessed horrific atrocities perpetrated by Russia's forces since President Putin launched his devastating and unjustifiable war of choice against Ukraine. We are working through partnerships with U.S. academia and the private sector to assist current and future quests for justice following months of fighting and mounting evidence of these widespread, large-scale atrocities that have been committed.

To ensure that crimes committed by Russia's forces are documented and perpetrators are held accountable, today we have launched a new Conflict Observatory for Ukraine. The program will capture, analyze, and make publicly available open-source information and evidence of atrocities, human rights abuses, and harm to civilian infrastructure, including Ukraine's cultural heritage. Forthcoming reports will be posted on the program's website: ConflictObservatory.org.

The information collected by the Conflict Observatory will be a resource for the world to see the deplorable and brutal actions of Russia's forces against the Ukrainian people. It will shine a light on atrocities and is intended to contribute to eventual prosecutions in Ukraine's domestic courts, courts in third-party countries, U.S. courts, and other relevant tribunals. It will provide information to refute Russia's disinformation campaigns and expand the range of our and our partners' accountability mechanisms.

However long it takes, we are committed to seeing that justice is served.

In Guatemala yesterday, President Giammattei chose to re-appoint Maria Consuelo Porras Argueta de Porres as attorney general, despite her record of facilitating corruption. This is a step backward for Guatemalan democracy, transparency, and rule of law – a step that will hurt the people of Guatemala.

During her tenure, Attorney General Porras has worked to dismantle Guatemala's justice sector, protect corrupt actors, and perpetuate impunity. She has a documented record of obstructing and undermining anticorruption investigations in Guatemala to protect her allies and gain undue favor. Porras's pattern of obstruction includes reportedly ordering prosecutors in Guatemala's Public Ministry to ignore cases based on personal or political considerations and firing prosecutors who investigate cases involving acts of corruption.

This corruption weakens the Guatemalan Government's ability to reduce violence and stop narcotraffickers. It also slows down economic growth and scares away investments, robbing Guatemalans of jobs and opportunity – all of which are primary factors driving migration.

Yesterday, as a result, we announced the public designation of the attorney general under Section 7013(c)^[1] of the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act of 2022. This designation renders the attorney general and her immediate family members ineligible for entry into the United States. We'll have more announcements about consequences for the bilateral relationship of this decision at the appropriate time, and we'll continue to robustly use our counter-corruption tools going forward.

The United States is determined to stand with all Guatemalans in support of democracy and the rule of law, and against those who would undermine these principles for personal gain. We call on the Government of Guatemala to take serious, concrete steps to reverse democratic backsliding.

And finally, on Monday, May 23rd, the United States will welcome the Organization of Islamic Cooperation – OIC – Secretary General, His Excellency Hissein Brahim Taha, and the OIC delegation to Washington, D.C., for the inaugural U.S.-OIC Strategic Dialogue.

The United States and the OIC have been close partners for decades, and we share enduring economic, social, cultural, and person-to-person ties with the organization and its 57 members. The

launching of this dialogue is an important affirmation of our growing ties. The dialogue will be led on our side by our Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs Assistant Secretary Yael Lempert and other senior department officials.

On Wednesday, May 25th, Secretary Blinken will meet with the OIC Secretary General. We'll discuss shared challenges and opportunities in the fight against climate change, our support for greater respect for human rights the world over, mutual goals regarding women's empowerment and health issues, and our commitment to countering violent extremism.

The strategic dialogue with the OIC is also part of our commitment to working closely with multilateral organizations, and it shows the depth and breadth of our shared interests. Through our sustained engagement, we will further this important partnership and enable greater joint efforts to address shared challenges.

So having said all that, there may be time for a final question or two.

QUESTION: (Laughter.) I've got a – thank you. Let me see, I've got a couple very brief logistical ones. But they'll only be brief if you keep your answers brief, so make —

MR PRICE: Okay.

QUESTION: Let me make that appeal.

MR PRICE: Okay.

QUESTION: Just one on this Ukraine Observatory.

MR PRICE: Yes.

QUESTION: I'm not quite – what exactly is new about – I mean, aren't you guys already doing this?

MR PRICE: Well, it's a new mechanism. And essentially, we are providing millions of dollars worth of funding to our partners on the outside.

QUESTION: Aren't you already providing millions of dollars of funding to your partners?

MR PRICE: Well, yes, to partners to work with the Ukrainian Prosecutor General. But this is a new mechanism, and it's a new mechanism that will encompass the efforts of some of our key partners, including Yale, including Esri, PlantScape AI, the Smithsonian Cultural Rescue Initiative.

QUESTION: And these groups, these institutions or groups weren't involved before?

MR PRICE: You would have to ask them about their level of involvement before, but this is the first time we've launched a portal like this that will not only be a mechanism by which the Department can work with these outside organizations to collect, to analyze, to document, but also importantly to share the findings that together we're able to uncover. And just as I said, they will be shared publicly on the website.

QUESTION: Well, I think you've said almost the exact same thing as it relates to the collection of war crimes evidence in the past. So anyway, it's fine that you have a new mechanism. I just want to know if there's – I mean, fundamentally you're still doing the same thing, right?

MR PRICE: We have been engaged in the work through a variety of mechanisms and efforts to collect, to document, to analyze, to share evidence of potential atrocities, potential war crimes with the relevant prosecutors, with relevant state entities, with relevant organizations. But this is the first time that these partners will have come together and to share those findings so that not only the public can see it, to shine a spotlight on what Russia's forces are doing in Ukraine, but so that relevant authorities in areas of appropriate jurisdiction, including within Ukraine, potentially including within the United States – so that prosecutors can potentially even build criminal cases based on the material that is published online.

QUESTION: Okay. On the Afghan embassy and consulates thing that – that I pointed out to you earlier?

MR PRICE: We will get you updated information on that.

QUESTION: You don't – do you know why off the top of your head the U.S. – I mean – the U.S. – the Afghan mission to the UN is not included in —

MR PRICE: I'm sorry. I didn't hear.

QUESTION: The Afghan mission to the UN is not one of the facilities that has – that is being quote/unquote, “seized, taken control”?

MR PRICE: I don’t have any more details to share, but if we do, we’ll let you know.

QUESTION: On the Secretary’s meeting tomorrow with the Turkish foreign minister, are you guys more, less, or the same concerned about what President Erdoğan’s position is on Finland and Sweden?

MR PRICE: Well, you heard the Secretary speak to this over the weekend in Berlin. And the Secretary was in Berlin to meet with his counterparts in the context of a NATO ministerial. He had an opportunity to meet with Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu there, to speak with him. Other NATO members did as well. The Secretary, as you alluded to, Matt, will have an opportunity to see the foreign minister, Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu, on the sidelines of the UN event tomorrow in New York City.

What the Secretary said is that he, of course – and we, of course, won’t characterize private conversations, but there was over the weekend and there has been a strong consensus for bringing Finland and Sweden into the Alliance if they so choose. The Secretary made the point that we are confident that we will be able to preserve that consensus should Finland, should Sweden, formally apply for NATO membership. Of course, that has not yet happened. I know there is a perception that it may be a foregone conclusion, but precedent, protocol, procedure – all those P words – are very important, especially in the world of diplomacy. So we’ll reserve further comment until we hear additional —

QUESTION: Well, but are – there seem to be, at best, conflicting if not absolutely contradictory positions coming from the President and then President Erdoğan, and then apparently the people who the Secretary and NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg have been – and the other foreign ministers have been talking to, because Erdoğan’s comments yesterday were very clear in raising opposition. So are you still seeking clarification of the Turkish position or —

MR PRICE: It is not for us to speak for the Turkish Government, of course. It is for us —

QUESTION: I’m asking you —

MR PRICE: It is for us to speak as —

QUESTION: — do you understand what the Turkish position is?

MR PRICE: — as a member of the NATO Alliance. And Secretary Blinken, who had the opportunity to sit into the – sit in on the foreign ministerial discussions in Berlin over the weekend came away with the same sense of confidence that there was strong consensus for admitting Finland and Sweden into the Alliance if they so choose to join, and we're confident we'll be able to preserve that consensus.

Daphne.

QUESTION: I mean, Erdoğan said yesterday that Swedish and Finnish delegations should not bother coming to Ankara to convince it to approve their NATO bid. I mean, I just don't understand how you're reconciling that there's this consensus when Turkey's telling them not even to bother coming.

MR PRICE: Again, it is not for me to speak for the Turkish Government or to characterize their position. What we can do is characterize what we heard inside the NATO ministerial, what we have heard in bilateral and multilateral – including in conversations as an Alliance – with our fellow NATO Allies. There is strong consensus, there has been strong consensus for admitting Finland and Sweden if they so choose to join, and again, as you heard from the Secretary, we are confident we'll be able to preserve that consensus.

QUESTION: Has Turkey asked for anything from the U.S. in exchange for supporting their bids?

MR PRICE: Again, we're not going to read out private conversations. The Secretary did have a chance to see the foreign minister, Çavuşoğlu, in Berlin. He will have a chance to see him in New York City and I am certain these conversations will continue.

Francesco.

QUESTION: Just to follow up on that, you keep referring to the confidence that emerged from the meeting over the weekend, and were referring to what President Erdoğan said yesterday, so is that confidence still there? And what explains your confidence as to President Erdoğan said the contrary publicly?

MR PRICE: I am explaining our confidence in the context of discussions that we have had bilaterally, multilaterally, and together as an Alliance. Again, it is not for me to characterize the Turkish Government's position. It is for us to characterize our position. You know where we stand should Finland and Sweden opt to apply for NATO membership. You have heard from a range of other NATO Allies, of their positions on this. Some have been quite explicit. I'm sure more will be if and when we hear that Finland and/or Sweden are formally applying for the Alliance, but all of the conversations we have had to date lend us that sense of confidence that we will be able to preserve that strong consensus for admitting Finland and Sweden if they so choose to apply.

QUESTION: And so today, after President Erdoğan spoke yesterday, you are confident that Turkey will not be a roadblock on the way – on that path?

MR PRICE: Our assessment of the sentiment among our NATO Allies and within the NATO Alliance has not changed.

QUESTION: Can I follow up?

MR PRICE: Kylie.

QUESTION: Yeah. So I'm just – you refused to answer the question if Turkey's asking the United States for anything to allow Sweden and Finland to join. You said that was private discussions. But if Turkey does leverage this moment to get something that it wants from NATO members in return for greenlighting these two countries joining, doesn't that set a dangerous precedent? And can you speak to efforts underway to make sure that precedent isn't set?

MR PRICE: Your question entails a hypothetical that's on top of a hypothetical. Neither country have yet put forward an application for membership. Turkey, of course, has not made any specific asks or requests. So I will respectfully dodge the question on those two grounds, but again, we are having these conversations among Allies bilaterally and as an Alliance with the 30 existing NATO Allies. Those conversations will continue. Secretary Blinken, again, will have an opportunity to speak to Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu. Other conversations are ongoing between and among current NATO Allies and with potential aspirant countries.

QUESTION: And just one more question: Are you confident that Turkey's concerns will be in the rear view mirror by the time the leaders of Sweden and Finland come to the White House later this

week?

MR PRICE: We are confident that we will be able to preserve the consensus within the Alliance of strong support for a potential application of Finland and Sweden.

Yes.

QUESTION: Ned, same topic?

MR PRICE: Stay on the same topic? Sure.

QUESTION: Based on your response, is it fair for us to assume that you still don't have clear understanding of what Turkey wants?

MR PRICE: The Turkish officials have made public statements. I would refer you to those public statements, including some statements that have been referenced here already.

QUESTION: Well, that doesn't clear up anything, because the statements that —

MR PRICE: Again, it is not — it is —

QUESTION: We get you telling us that in Berlin the Turks were all on board and then the president of the country comes out yesterday and says he's not on board.

MR PRICE: It is not up to me to characterize what the Turkish Government's position is. I will leave it — I will leave it —

QUESTION: No, but that's not the question. It's: Do you understand what the Turkish position is?

MR PRICE: I will leave it to the Turkish Government to articulate —

QUESTION: Is it clear to you?

MR PRICE: — to articulate their position.

Yes, please.

QUESTION: Is it clear to the United State Government what the Turkish position is?

QUESTION: On two major issues. So one is media freedom in Georgia and the second one will be about the rights of the LGBTQI community in Georgia as well. So yesterday the director of Mtavari Channel, Nika Gvaramia, was imprisoned for three and a half years. Based on the verdict by the Georgian city court, this U.S. Ambassador to Georgia issued the statement on this that reads, and I'm quoting, "The disturbing pattern of selective investigations and prosecution targeting those in opposition to the current government undermines the public's confidence in the police, prosecution, the courts, and the government itself." The ranking member of the Senate's Foreign Relations Committee, Jim Risch, tweeted as well, and I'm quoting, "Silencing political opposition will send Georgia in a very troubling direction."

That's the channel that I work for. I don't know if I have a job next week or not. That's the same concern that my team in Tbilisi has. So taking into account how much the U.S. Government values and cherish the importance of free media worldwide, what do you have to say about that?

MR PRICE: We have been quite clear, quite candid with our Georgian partners about the continued need to strengthen the pillars of democracy that we want to see bolstered in Georgia, that we want to see bolstered around the world. That includes democratic institutions; it includes the rule of law as well. And we'll continue to partner with the people of Georgia as they pursue a democratic, prosperous, peaceful, and Euro-Atlantic future.

When it comes to media freedom, you have heard us consistently speak to the indispensability of a free, of an independent media the world over. Secretary Blinken just a couple weeks spoke to this in extended remarks at the Foreign Press Center here in Washington, D.C., where he extolled the virtue and really the necessity of a free and independent media, noting that over the past year, too many journalists have been repressed, too much of their work has been suppressed, and too many tragically have been wounded or even killed in the line of duty. And of course, their duty is to do nothing more than to report the truth, to spread the truth the world over using nothing more than a pen and perhaps a keyboard.

So we'll continue to stand resolutely behind independent media, whether it's in Georgia, whether it is anywhere around the world.

QUESTION: And all the LGBTQI rights in Georgia, that community still cannot enjoy their

constitutional rights to peaceful assembly and to freedom of expression, because Georgian Orthodox Church and pro-Russian ultra-nationalists persecute them and threaten to beat and kill anyone who tries to rally in the street. So Georgian Government and the law enforcement do not guarantee the safety – the prime minister last year called for not holding the peaceful rally because the police wasn't able to protect them from the violent mob.

How much of a support should the members of the LGBTQI community in Georgia expect from the United States?

MR PRICE: LGBTQI communities around the world have the support of the United States. That is not only a rhetorical position; it's a policy position. In February of 2021, President Biden issued an executive order calling for, once again, the policy of the United States, of our foreign affairs departments and agencies, to be to protect and to promote the rights of LGBTQI+ persons around the world. We do that in a number of ways. We of course do it rhetorically, but we also do it through programmatic funding for supporting the important work of advocacy organizations, for calling out abuses, repression, intimidation, violence against LGBTQI communities around the world.

And of course, whether the cause, whether the community is the community of LGBTQI+ individuals or any other community, including marginalized communities, we always call for universal rights to be protected and to be enshrined in democratic institutions. And of course, the right the peaceful assembly, the right to freedom of expression – two of those important rights.

QUESTION: And very lastly, when you look at the media free speech in Georgia – we just previewed that – and when you look at the human rights record of the country, I know you don't preview any sanctions or speak about the hypotheticals. But still, I just want to gather your thoughts on the general idea where the U.S. Government stands on that. When you look at those two venues of a country that is declared to be a partner of the United States, what is your major concern? Do you – how do you see the detrimental effect of the Georgia-U.S. relations when you look at those two avenues, and that's the least?

MR PRICE: Well, we do consider Georgia a strategic partner. And as a strategic partner, the United States is well positioned to encourage Georgia down the path of reform, to encourage Georgia to take on some of the improvements, some of the steps that we have talked about here.

Of course, Georgia's aspirations don't occur overnight. They're impossible to realize over the course

of a single year, even a single decade. It takes hard work; it takes patience. It takes significant resources to realize. Part of our task is to continue to partner with Georgia, to continue to support them down that path, to do that with resources, with guidance, with direct support in many cases. And that is an area where we will continue to cooperate closely with our Georgian partners.

Yes.

QUESTION: On Ukraine, just going back to something last week, President Zelenskyy told Chatham House in London that he'd be open to start discussing things normally with the Russians if the Russian military pulled back to their position that they were at on February 23rd. He said something similar to Margaret Brennan on CBS News – the beginning of April – he mentioned the date February 24th. What does this administration understand that to mean? Does that mean the Russians need to pull out of the country, or pull back to where their forces were already operating in parts of the Donbas? And then does that mean that Zelenskyy would be open to giving up parts of the Donbas to discuss with the Russians to move negotiations forwards?

MR PRICE: The important point here is that it is not for us to define the objectives that our Ukrainian partners seek to achieve. It is the task of the Ukrainian Government, which is, in turn, expressing the will of the Ukrainian people. It's a democratically elected government, a representative government, and it is up to that government on behalf of the Ukrainian people to define what their objectives in pushing back on Russian aggression should be.

It is our task to support our Ukrainian partners in every appropriate way we can, to strengthen their hand at the negotiating table, recognizing that, at the moment, there are not high-level negotiations to speak of. We have heard very clearly from our Ukrainian partners that there has been no significant progress, that the Russian Federation has remained intractable in its positions.

And so of course, what we are doing now is two things: one, as I said before, supporting and strengthening the hand of our partners in Kyiv; and two, simultaneously, is imposing the massive costs and consequences that we have warned the Kremlin about since late last year. And in doing so, it is our hope to generate the conditions where dialogue, where good-faith diplomacy can take place.

And, of course, more so than the process, we are most concerned about the outcome, seeing to it that our Ukrainian partners are successful in seeing their objectives through. To do that, we will

continue to provide them with security assistance. We will continue to provide them with economic assistance. We will continue to provide our Ukrainian partners, the Ukrainian people, with what they need with humanitarian assistance in the meantime as well.

Yes.

QUESTION: Just a follow-up to that: If your job is not to define their objectives but it is to support your Ukrainian partners – excuse me – at what point does that stop for those objectives and that support? Is there a limit to what the U.S. is willing to back?

MR PRICE: The U.S. wants what the Ukrainian people and the Ukrainian Government wants. It is a Ukraine that is democratic, a Ukraine that is independent, a Ukraine that is sovereign, a Ukraine that is free. Now, the contours of that, the specific objectives, will have to be defined by the Ukrainian Government – what those objectives are to them, how they want to pursue those at the negotiating table. Those are not questions for us. Those are questions for our Ukrainian partners to sort through.

Yes, Michael. Yes, in the back.

QUESTION: Yeah, thanks. So recently on this topic, the French President Macron implied that we should learn lessons from World War I and not punish Russia too severely. I was wondering if you could speak on the topic of whether the U.S. and its European allies support the same endgame scenario in Ukraine. And then, more broadly, if you could choose your most ideal, realistic endgame in Ukraine, what would that be?

MR PRICE: So I think your second question is just a clever way of asking the last question that was asked to me. It is not up to us to choose our ideal endgame. It is up to our Ukrainian partners to determine how they would like to see this conflict end. What we know is that they would – just like United States, just like NATO, just like the international community – we would profoundly like to see this conflict end. We would like to see a cessation of the violence, a cessation of the bloodshed, a cessation of the atrocities that have inflicted the country of Ukraine over the past 82 days, owing to the brutality that Russia's forces are perpetrating against Ukraine's people, its state, and its government as well.

Your first question —

QUESTION: Possible fissures between the Europeans' idea of what an endgame scenario would be like and what the United States endgame is.

MR PRICE: We have any number of fora in which to discuss with our European partners and our European allies the long-term course of all of this. And I think there is no daylight between the United States and our European partners in the G7, in our European partners in the Quad, the European Quad, our European partners in the European Quint, our European partners at the EU, and our European partners more broadly – that we would like to see – and we know the Ukrainian people and government would like to see and will see – a Ukraine that at the end of this conflict is free, it is independent, it is sovereign, and democratic.

Yes.

QUESTION: Yeah. Different topic, please.

MR PRICE: Sure.

QUESTION: Thank you, Ned. About the corona crisis in North Korea, it was reported that three North Korean cargo planes were carrying corona treatment medicine from China yesterday. You know that the North Korea likes Chinese vaccines. What if North Korea requests assistance through COVAX with the United States (inaudible) North Korea's – if North Korea wants assistance through COVAX.

MR PRICE: Your question is what has North Korea requested?

QUESTION: Yeah.

MR PRICE: Well, unfortunately, to date the DPRK has refused all vaccine donations from COVAX. I say it is unfortunate because we are deeply concerned about the apparent COVID outbreak within the DPRK, how it might affect the North Korean people. And the United States continues to support the provision of vaccines to the DPRK. We would like to see humanitarian, including medical relief, provided to the people of the DPRK. To that end, we strongly support and encourage the efforts of U.S. and international aid and health organizations in seeking to prevent and, as necessary, to contain the outbreak, the spread of COVID-19 in the DPRK, and to provide other forms of humanitarian assistance to the North Korean people.

It is COVAX that determines allocations for the Pfizer vaccines we have donated. Those are the brunt of the vaccines that we have donated. Should COVAX allocate doses to the DPRK, we would be supportive of that, as we would to any member of the grouping and to the African Union as well. As I said before, however, it is the DPRK that has consistently refused all vaccine donations. We don't currently have bilateral plans to share vaccines with the DPRK, but we continue to support, as I've said before, those international efforts aimed at the provision of critical humanitarian aid to the most vulnerable within North Korea.

There is another great irony, or perhaps it's even a tragedy, in that even as the DPRK continues to refuse the donation of much – apparently much-needed COVID vaccines, they continue to invest untold sums in ballistic missile and nuclear weapons programs that do nothing to alleviate the humanitarian plight of the North Korean people. The DPRK leadership continues to enrich themselves, to take care of their cronies, while the people of the North – of the DPRK suffer, apparently now with the added burden of COVID.

QUESTION: There was previously that South Korean director of intelligence service said that there is the secret papers. He announced that the U.S. and South Korea previously suggested this through the COVAX, but Kim Jong-un refuses to help. Is that true?

MR PRICE: We have discussed with our Republic of Korea allies, with our Japanese allies, and with others ways that we might mitigate the humanitarian plight of the North Korean people. Unfortunately, it is the North Korean leadership that has prevented many of those steps from proceeding.

QUESTION: Lastly, do you think North Korea likely to put on hold nuclear test due to coronavirus?

MR PRICE: We have never seen the DPRK regime prioritize the humanitarian concerns of their own people over these destabilizing programs that pose a threat to peace and security in the Indo-Pacific and beyond, so I do not think there is any expectation of that.

Yes, Nazira.

QUESTION: Thank you. Two question, and surprise, one is about Haqqani's recent interview in CNN, and he said the United States is not our enemy. So good thing. If United State not your enemy, United State has expectation to reopen girls' school. Number one, do you have the same – United

States has the same position, establish friendship – new friendship – with Haqqani Network, leader of the Taliban?

MR PRICE: It is our position that the women and girls of Afghanistan, including those girls who have been denied the opportunity to attend post-secondary education for weeks now – it is our strong position, it is the position of countries around the world, as you may have seen in a statement that came out from the G7 and other multilateral statements as well, that these girls have – should have the opportunity to attend school, to build skills, to develop the capacity to improve their own lives, to improve the lives of their families, and ultimately the welfare and the livelihood of their communities and their country. We have made the point before that any society that seeks to suppress, to hold back, half of its population is not a society that can be thriving, is not even a society that can succeed.

So, of course, we've seen the remarks from Siraj Haqqani. I think you will understand that we have developed a well-earned skepticism of these sorts of comments. We've heard these types of comments before. What we care much more about rather than rhetoric is action, and we await the Taliban acting on these positive signals and reopening schools at all levels across the country, which itself would be a very welcome development.

QUESTION: Okay. The second question, Mr. Price, can you update U.S. on Afghan funds frozen by the New York courts?

MR PRICE: You may recall that several months ago now there was an executive order that came forth from the White House that spoke to the disposition of the \$7 billion – approximately \$7 billion – in frozen assets. It provided for a sum, an element, a part of these assets to be used for the humanitarian needs of the Afghan people. So that is something that we continue to work closely with our colleagues throughout the administration, including in the Department of Justice.

But as you know, Nazira, we have continued to be the world's leader in terms of our humanitarian support to the people of Afghanistan, contributing hundreds of millions of dollars for education, for health care, for shelter, for food, for clean water, for sanitation, and for winterization projects at the appropriate time. We will continue to do that going forward, using the humanitarian funding that we currently have available to us.

QUESTION: Thank you.

MR PRICE: Yes, Daphne.

QUESTION: On Taiwan, Taiwan has been trying to secure an invitation to the World Health Assembly, and 13 member states made a proposal for it to join. Was the U.S. one of the 13? And what is the U.S. doing to try to get Taiwan access to the WHA, beyond public statements?

MR PRICE: Well, we strongly advocate for the WHO to invite Taiwan to participate as an observer and lend its expertise to the solution-seeking discussions at the 75th World Health Assembly, scheduled for this month. We believe that inviting Taiwan to participate as an observer would exemplify the WHO's commitment – stated commitment – to an inclusive approach to international health cooperation and, quote/unquote, “health for all.” Taiwan in that regard is a highly capable, engaged, responsible member of the global health community, with unique expertise and approaches that can benefit the world.

We've made this point before, that Taiwan has much to share with the world in different realms, including in the realm of public health. And, of course, Taiwan's absence from the WHA in recent years is something that we have sought to rectify. The WHO broke years of precedent at the 70th World Health Assembly in 2017 when it failed to invite a Taiwanese delegation to observe. Taiwan's inclusion^[2], unfortunately, has continued every year since 2017.

As we continue to battle a pandemic, as we continue to confront other public health threats, Taiwan's isolation from the world's preeminent global health forum – it's unwarranted. It represents itself a serious health concern. We believe that its significant public health expertise, its technical and technological capabilities, its democratic governments – governance, its resilience in the face of COVID-19, and its robust economy offer considerable resources to inform the WHA's deliberations, and we believe there is no reasonable justification to exclude its participation.

QUESTION: Was the U.S. one of the 13 that made the proposal?

MR PRICE: We have supported – excuse me – Taiwan's participation as an observer in at the World Health Assembly.

Nick.

QUESTION: Just back to Afghanistan quickly, there was some reporting that the Afghans during the

NEO who didn't pass vet and were being held at Camp Bondsteel in Kosovo – there were about some 16 of them – that the State Department is making a final determination of what to do with these 16 or more. Has a final determination been made on what to do with them? And if so, where are they going?

MR PRICE: So I don't have anything to share in terms of specific cases, but as you know, every individual who was transported out of Afghanistan underwent and has undergone, in most cases, vetting throughout by the interagency, by our partners within law enforcement, within the Intelligence Community, within the Department of Homeland Security as well. In some cases, there have been individuals who have required additional vetting. They have undergone that additional vetting at Camp Bondsteel. In many cases, that remains ongoing, but I just don't have anything to offer in terms of disposition.

Yes.

QUESTION: One follow-up. Is there a time limit on how long they can be held at Camp Bondsteel?

MR PRICE: Again, the vetting usually can take place fairly quickly. There will be limited cases that require a longer vetting period. Our goal always is to see to it that we can complete the process as quickly as possible.

QUESTION: A follow-up on that, please?

MR PRICE: Yeah.

QUESTION: Just one question. Can you definitively say that they won't be sent back to Afghanistan?

MR PRICE: I will – I can definitively say that we will comply with all regulations and guidelines when it comes to international humanitarian law and the principle of non-refoulement.

QUESTION: Can we go to Iran?

MR PRICE: Sure.

QUESTION: Okay. Israeli defense minister said, I think yesterday, that Iran is currently trying to

complete the production and installation of 1,000 advanced IR-6 centrifuges, including at a new underground facility being built near Natanz. Is that the U.S. understanding of what is currently occurring by the Iranians?

MR PRICE: I am not going to detail what our understanding is. As you might gather, much of this, some of this may be derived from elements that we typically don't speak to in public. But of course, we do share information routinely with our Israeli partners. We have a common understanding across many fronts, and we share a common strategic interest and that is seeing to it that Iran is never able to acquire a nuclear weapon.

So of course, our Israeli partners are not the only ones to have expressed concern about the progress that Iran's nuclear program has been in position to make since the previous administration left the Iran nuclear deal in 2018. We, too, have expressed our own profound concerns about the pace at which Iran's nuclear program has been in a position to gallop forward since 2018.

That is precisely why we are continuing to test whether we will be able to secure a mutual return to compliance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, because doing so remains profoundly in our interest. It would put back in a box the nuclear program, a nuclear program that has not been subject to the same limits, to the same transparency, to the same verification and monitoring that Iran's nuclear program was prior to 2018 when the nuclear agreement was in full force – when it was verifiably and demonstrably, according to international weapons inspectors, according to this building, and according to our Intelligence Community, working to prevent Iran from ever obtaining a nuclear weapon.

QUESTION: Ned, on this topic, U.S. Central Command chief lands in Israel tonight to coordinate a joint Iran strike exercise. Is the military option on the table now since the Vienna talks stalled?

MR PRICE: We believe that diplomacy and dialogue affords an opportunity to sustainably and durably and permanently put an end to Iran's ability to produce or otherwise acquire a nuclear weapon.

Yes, Gitte.

QUESTION: You're aware that Enrique Mora left the – Iran on Friday, so I think it's safe to assume

that by now, he may – he has briefed Rob Malley on his talks with the Iranian officials. The Iranians are saying that they have presented it as several proposals. You have said that you don't negotiate in public, but can you confirm that?

MR PRICE: Well, we don't negotiate in public. What I will say is that we and our partners are ready. We have been for some time. We believe it is now up to Iran to demonstrate its seriousness. As you've heard from us before, there are a small number of outstanding issues. We believe these small number of outstanding issues pertaining to Iran's nuclear program could be bridged and closed quite quickly and effectively, if Iran were to make the decision to do so. We are grateful, as always, for Enrique Mora and his team's efforts to – and we look forward to more detailed conversations with them in the days ahead.

But, as you've heard from us before, at this point, a deal remains far from certain. Iran needs to decide, as I alluded to before, whether it insists on conditions that are extraneous to the JCPOA, or whether it is ready, willing, and able to conclude the JCPOA, a mutual return to compliance with it, quickly. We know that it would serve America's national security interests; we believe that it, in turn, would serve all sides' interests.

QUESTION: Well, they're saying the same thing, that it's now up to the U.S. to make the decision, and that if it does so, if it does answer, that you could get back to the talks again.

MR PRICE: There are a number of parties involved in this negotiation. I think if you talk to the parties, they will tell you that the United States has negotiated indirectly, in the case of Iran, earnestly, in good faith, seeking to arrive at a mutual return to compliance. And unfortunately, the same cannot always be said of the Iranian side.

QUESTION: One last one on this?

MR PRICE: Sure.

QUESTION: There are reports that Iran has set up a drone factory in Tajikistan. Are you aware – is the United States aware of this? Because the Israeli defense minister thinks that the drone program also is part of their program to send drones to Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank.

MR PRICE: We've expressed our concerns about Iranian UAV technology. We have taken action

using appropriate authorities against proliferators of Iranian UAV technology. I just don't have anything to add on a possible drone factory in Tajikistan.

Courtney.

QUESTION: A couple on Russia?

QUESTION: On Iran? Yeah.

MR PRICE: Okay.

QUESTION: Go ahead.

MR PRICE: Iran? Go ahead.

QUESTION: Iran, yeah. Last week, we heard that Iran arrested two Europeans. Today we got to know they are French; we know their name. And Iran is labeling them with security accusation, like always familiar pattern. That is a matter related to French – to France foreign minister, so my question for you is about the negotiations you are having in Vienna about the hostages, dual nationalities, foreign citizens. Those negotiations, are they still going on? Are they tied to the nuclear talks? Can you give us an update? And as a country who has at least five citizens in Iranian jail, how do you react to that behavior?

MR PRICE: Well, let me first start with the arrest of the two French nationals. We, of course, are aware of these reports. We echo what you've heard from our French allies, the condemnation of these arrests. We similarly call on Iran to immediately release these two French nationals. As you alluded to, Iran has a long history of unjustly imprisoning foreign nationals in an attempt to use them as political leverage. It continues to engage in a range of human rights abuses, which include arbitrary and large-scale detention of individuals, some of whom have faced torture and execution after trials that have lacked due process. These practices are outrageous. We have continued to speak out against them together with our allies and partners.

When it comes to the Americans, the U.S. citizens who are held unjustly inside Iran and who have been for years, as we often say, we have no higher priority than seeing – than the safety and security of Americans everywhere, and of course, that includes Americans who are unjustly

detained in places around the world.

The – we have been careful not to tie the fate of these individuals – their freedom, I should say – to a potential mutual return to compliance with the JCPOA. And we've been careful not to do that for precisely what I said just a moment ago. A mutual return to compliance with the JCPOA is far from certain. We want to see the return of our unjustly detained American citizens as a certainty.

Now it is true, as you have heard others say, that we are treating this as an utmost priority. The Iranians – we have made quite clear to them the priority we attach to this, and it is something that we will continue to do, regardless of what happens with the JCPOA.

Yes.

QUESTION: I have another one about a phone call between Secretary Blinken and the Qatari Foreign Minister Al-Thani. He thanked him for the mediating role he played between Iran and America. My question is that – can you give us detail about what sort of a role Qatar played and what exactly Al-Thani achieved from his trip to Iran?

MR PRICE: So I will have to refer you to the Qatari authorities to speak to the Amir's visit to Iran. What I can say is that we're grateful for the constructive role that Qatar has played in our efforts to achieve diplomatic resolutions to some of the important and difficult issues between the U.S. and Iran, and that includes what you referred to just a moment ago, the unjust detention of several U.S. citizens and our efforts to achieve a mutual return to compliance with the JCPOA.

Courtney.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) on Russia. Secretary – Defense Secretary Austin spoke on Friday with his Russian counterpart, and I'm just curious if there are plans for Secretary Blinken and Foreign Minister Lavrov to speak – they haven't done so since February 12th – and just if there are additional lines of communication beyond Ambassador Sullivan and officials in Moscow.

MR PRICE: You are correct that the Secretary has not spoken to his Russian counterpart since February, and this goes back to something I noted just a moment ago in terms of where we are and, more precisely, where we are not with the diplomacy. The Russian Federation has not given – has not afforded us any reason to believe that a conversation at that level between Secretary Blinken

and Foreign Minister Lavrov would be constructive in the current environment. We have demonstrated many times that we have no bones about picking up the phone if doing so – having a conversation, having a meeting – has the potential to lead to a more constructive outcome. Everything we have heard from our Ukrainian partners, everything we have heard publicly from the Russians gives us no indication that a conversation at this time would be a useful exercise.

There are lines of communication between the United States and Russia. As you know, we have an embassy that is limited in terms of its – in terms of its ability to function fully given some of the restrictions that the Russians have unjustly and unfairly imposed on our mission community in Moscow. But Ambassador Sullivan continues, as he did last week, to meet with and to speak with his MFA counterparts. Our Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs here in Washington continues to have occasional contact with Russian officials who are based here. We have spoken previously of the National Security Advisor's contact with his Russian counterpart, Mr. Patrushev. And as the Pentagon read out this – Secretary Austin did have an opportunity to speak with his Russian counterpart.

There are issues that the Defense Department deals with, including issues of deconfliction, that are more tactical, that are different from the types of strategic conversations that Secretary Blinken has had in the past with Foreign Minister Lavrov, and if the conditions present themselves and if we make the judgment that a conversation between them could advance the cause of a diminution of violence or easing the humanitarian plight of the Ukrainian people that they may have going forward.

QUESTION: And can you just give us an update on the case of Brittney Griner? There's some talk of a possible prisoner swap with Viktor Bout, for instance.

MR PRICE: Well, of course I'm not going to get into – I'm not going to entertain that. But let me first speak generally to her case. You may have seen Ambassador Sullivan issued a statement earlier today. He made the point that it is unacceptable that for the third time in a month, Russian authorities have denied an embassy visit to Brittney Griner. A consular official was able to speak with her on the margins of her court proceedings on Friday. That consular official came away with the impression that Brittney Griner is doing as well as might be expected under conditions that can only be described as exceedingly difficult.

But sporadic contact is not satisfactory. It also may not be consistent with the Vienna Convention, to

which Russia has subscribed. That is why we continue to urge the Russian Government to allow consistent, timely consular access to all U.S. citizens detained in Russia, in line with those very legal obligations, and to allow us to provide consular services for U.S. citizens detained in Russia.

Among the issues that Ambassador Sullivan raises with his MFA counterparts are the cases of detained Americans. More broadly, I can confirm that Secretary Blinken had an opportunity in recent days to speak to the wife of Brittney Griner. He conveyed once again the priority we attach to seeing the release of all Americans around the world, including Brittney Griner in the case of Russia, Paul Whelan in the case of Russia – those are Americans who we consider to be wrongfully detained. That has been a priority of Secretary Blinken since the earliest days of his tenure. He's had an opportunity to speak with the families of American hostages and detainees as a group, but he often does one-on-one – has one-on-one conversations with these families as well. And he was appreciative of the ability to speak to Brittney Griner's wife.

QUESTION: Ned?

MR PRICE: Yes.

QUESTION: I have a couple questions on the Middle East. First, how will the U.S. delegation visit to UAE to offer condolences affect the relations between the two countries, and how was or how can you describe the meeting between Secretary Blinken and UAE foreign minister yesterday?

MR PRICE: Well, as you know, Secretary Blinken did join the delegation that was led by the Vice President to offer condolences and to pay respects to Sheikh Khalifa, and to honor his memory, his legacy in the context of his passing. The Vice President underscored the strength and the – of the partnership between our countries and our desire to further deepen our ties in the coming months and years. Really, the visit itself was an opportunity to commemorate the life of Sheikh Khalifa and to congratulate His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed on assuming the presidency of the United Arab Emirates.

The Secretary did – on Monday night, I believe it was – have an opportunity to have dinner with his Emirati counterpart. It was a session that, again, commemorated the life and legacy of Sheikh Khalifa and was held in that context, but they were able to discuss a number of substantive areas, both regional and bilateral issues. They discussed our joint efforts to reinforce the ceasefire in Yemen; they discussed our – the international emphasis on defusing tensions in the West Bank and

Jerusalem; they discussed our joint cooperation in countering Iran and the threat that it poses; and ways that we can build on what is already a strong partnership between our two countries.

As you know, this is a relationship that Secretary Blinken – where Secretary Blinken has been fortunate to have had a lot of face time in recent weeks. He saw his Emirati counterpart in the Negev for the summit focused on the Abraham Accords. We then later traveled to Morocco, where he saw his Emirati counterpart, but of course met with Mohammed bin Zayed, then the crown prince, to discuss the relationship – the valued and valuable relationship – between the United States and the United Arab Emirates. And the conversation that he had with ABZ at dinner yesterday evening was an opportunity to build on those conversations and to look ahead to additional cooperation.

QUESTION: I have two more, one on Libya. Any comment on the clashes in the capital, Tripoli, and the visit that the prime minister made?

MR PRICE: We are highly concerned by reports of armed clashes in Tripoli. We urge all armed groups to refrain from violence, and for political leaders to recognize that trying to seize or retain power through force will only hurt the people of Libya. It's critical for Libyan leaders to find consensus to avoid clashes like the ones we saw yesterday. We continue to believe that the only viable path to legitimate leadership is by allowing Libyans to choose their leaders through free and fair elections. The constitutional talks underway in Cairo are now more important than ever. Members of the house of representatives and the HSC gathered there must recognize that the continued lack of a constitutional basis leading to presidential and parliamentary elections on a realistic but aggressive timeframe is depriving Libyans of the stability and the prosperity they deserve.

QUESTION: And finally, on Lebanon, any comment on the elections and the results? And do you think that Hizballah is weaker today than it was yesterday?

MR PRICE: Well, we are pleased that the parliamentary elections took place on time in Lebanon without major security incidents. We encourage Lebanon's political leaders to recommit themselves to the hard work that lies ahead, to implement needed reforms to rescue the economy. We believe that part of that important work that lies ahead is government formation, a government that is responsible and responsive to the Lebanese people, that can undertake some of the reforms that have been called for, some of the reforms that are necessary – both in terms of international

financial and lending institutions, but also, more importantly, to address the humanitarian concerns of the people of Lebanon.

Daphne.

QUESTION: Just to clarify quickly on UAE, and then I have a question on Ethiopia. Did oil not come up during yesterday's visit?

MR PRICE: Again, I don't have additional details to read out. We have held discussions with – previously with Saudi Arabia and the UAE on a collaborative approach to managing potential market pressures stemming from Russia's invasion of Ukraine. We are committed to doing everything we can and to work with other countries to bring down the costs of energy for the American people, and to make countries around the world more resilient to the type of – to potential price shocks and to potential disruptions in energy supplies owing to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

QUESTION: Okay, and then —

MR PRICE: Yes.

QUESTION: — the Ethiopia question, sorry.

MR PRICE: Ethiopia question.

QUESTION: Reuters reported yesterday that authorities in Ethiopia's Tigray region are forcing young people to join their army's fight against the central government by threatening and jailing relatives. Is this something the U.S. is aware of? And are you concerned that the TPLF may be preparing for a possible resurgence in combat?

MR PRICE: Well, we certainly hope not. Our goal is to build on the humanitarian truce that was announced on April – that was announced last month. We strongly support that humanitarian truce that the Government of Ethiopia and the Tigray regional authority have committed to as well. We've seen a series of encouraging actions by the Government of Ethiopia that we hope will lead and help lay the groundwork for an end to the conflict. That includes lifting the state of emergency, releasing some political prisoners and detainees. Tigrayan forces, for their part, have withdrawn most of their forces from Afar.

Our emphasis now is on doing all we can to support the parties in efforts to accelerate, to uphold, and expand efforts to ensure that this humanitarian truce sticks, but also to expand immediate, sustained, and unimpeded humanitarian access to all Ethiopians affected by this conflict. So certainly would not like to see any backtracking that has the potential to undermine the humanitarian truce that we've seen.

Yes.

QUESTION: Ned —

MR PRICE: Let me go to you, and then we'll come right to you.

QUESTION: My question is about the Secretary's policy speech on PRC. Could you help us – could you help us understand the rough outline of it? And I also wonder when he will deliver it.

MR PRICE: I am not in a position today to offer a rough outline, but I can assure you that the Secretary intends to deliver these remarks at the first possible opportunity. As you know, he was set to deliver it the other week, but of course, his COVID diagnosis disrupted those plans. But we'll have more details on that shortly.

Yes.

QUESTION: Thank you, Ned. I want to go back to the very first question on a new program. You said something important about sharing your findings with partners. Does that include the ICC as well? As you know, ICC is sending its largest-ever team to Ukraine. What is the U.S. position on that? And will you have your own separate investigation, or is this part of the cooperation with the ICC?

And secondly, President Zelenskyy last week said that he thinks that Moscow believes it's going to get away with its war crimes because of its nuclear capabilities. Can you assure us that that's not going to be the case? Thank you.

MR PRICE: In terms of the ICC, we support all international investigations into the atrocities in Ukraine. We welcomed the announcement by the prosecutor general of an effort vis-à-vis Ukraine. We support those conducted by the ICC.

We've said before that everything is on the table. We are considering the most appropriate options for accountability. We've also said that the Ukrainian prosecutor general, her team, obviously has an appropriate jurisdiction. They have developed well-developed efforts to document, to analyze, to preserve potential evidence of war crimes for criminal prosecutions. As you saw the announcement from her office just a couple days ago, they have actually started proceedings in one case.

So we will continue to pursue all appropriate venues to see accountability. And accountability means accountability; and no country – no matter how large, how potentially powerful, what types of weapons they may have in their arsenal – can escape accountability for the types of atrocities that we have seen Russia's forces perpetrate against the Ukrainian people.

We have already made the assessment that Russia's forces have committed war crimes. Our task now is to support those, to support the important work of those who are seeking to build criminal cases against those who are responsible for this, whether at the tactical level or those who at much more senior levels may have given orders or may have been complicit in the war crimes that have occurred.

Thank you all very much.

QUESTION: Thank you.

(The briefing was concluded at 3:38 p.m.)

[Department Press Briefing – May 11, 2022](#)

MR PRICE: Good afternoon. I apologize for the late start.

Let me start by saying that we are absolutely heartbroken to learn of the killing of Palestinian American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh and injuries to her producer Ali Samoudi today in the West Bank. We send our deepest condolences to Shireen's family, her friends and loved ones, and strongly condemn her killing as we do the killing of journalists around the world.

Shireen was a veteran reporter. She was followed closely by those who care about the region and is mourned by all who knew her. The Secretary spoke just one week ago on World Press Freedom Day about the fundamental role journalists play in the free flow of information, ideas, opinions, including dissenting ones, as being essential to inclusive and tolerant societies. It is heart-wrenching to see the killing of another journalist just one week later.

We call for an immediate and thorough investigation and full accountability. Investigating attacks on independent media and prosecuting those responsible are of paramount importance. We will continue to promote media freedom and protect journalists' ability to do their jobs without fear of violence, threats to their lives or safety, or unjust detention. Her death is a tragic loss and an affront to media freedom everywhere.

With that, I'll take your questions.

QUESTION: Thanks, Ned.

MR PRICE: Matt, I see you have a minder with you today. I'm very glad to see it.

QUESTION: Yes. Yeah, my boss. My boss. This is Anna. Ned, Anna.

QUESTION: Hello.

MR PRICE: Good to meet you. We'll talk later today.

QUESTION: Yes. On this situation, when you call for "an immediate and thorough investigation," who exactly do you want to do the investigating?

MR PRICE: We – it is important to us that those who are responsible for her death be held responsible, that full accountability be ensured in this case.

QUESTION: Okay, but my question is not that. My question is who do you think can conduct a credible investigation into her death that would be accepted by all parties, including the United States?

MR PRICE: Well, in this case, I'm not going to prejudge where any investigation may go. We've seen, of course, that the Israeli Defense Forces have already announced that there is an investigation underway. We welcome that announcement. It is important to us, it is important to the world that that investigation be thorough, that it be comprehensive, that it be transparent, and importantly, that investigations end with full accountability and those responsible for her death being held responsible for their actions.

QUESTION: Okay. But I mean, do you want the Palestinians to be involved in the investigation?

MR PRICE: The IDF has announced an investigation.

QUESTION: Okay, that's the IDF.

MR PRICE: Correct.

QUESTION: "I" standing for Israel.

MR PRICE: That is correct.

QUESTION: So what about the Palestinians? Because there are calls in Israel for the Palestinians to take part in this.

MR PRICE: What is – and I'm sure the Palestinians will do their own review as well. We have heard statements from both Israelis and Palestinians over the course of the day. What is important to us is that those responsible for this killing be held accountable for their actions.

QUESTION: Okay.

QUESTION: So —

QUESTION: All right, so just one more thing and then I'll defer. But are you confident that – maybe you're not because the investigation hasn't been done, but does it appear to you, circumstances right now as you know them, that she was targeted because she was a journalist?

MR PRICE: I'm not going to prejudge an investigation. That's precisely why we're calling for an investigation. We've heard the statements that she was clearly – she was wearing attire that was clearly – marked her as a journalist, but we are going to wait for the investigation to go where it goes. We are going to wait to hear where the facts lead in this case, and importantly, to see the accountability that is mounted in the aftermath of that investigation.

Said.

QUESTION: Ned, I just want to ask you, do you trust Israel investigating itself? I mean, I have asked this question over the past 20 years so many times. Can you trust them? Have they ever come back to you with saying these are the results? I mean, only in January, Omar Assad died in their custody, and you said – and he was a Palestinian American, and you said – from that podium you said that you are waiting on their investigating. You have not even followed through on this. So do you trust the Israelis investigating themselves?

MR PRICE: The Israelis have the wherewithal and the capabilities to conduct a thorough,

comprehensive investigation. Let me give you an example because you asked the question. In June of 2020, Israeli police in Jerusalem's Old City fatally shot – and you are familiar with this case – Iyad Halak, a Palestinian resident with autism, after he allegedly failed to stop and to obey orders. About a year later, in June of 2021, the Ministry of Justice's Department for Investigations of Police Officers, DIPO, filed an indictment with a Jerusalem district court against the border police officer who shot and killed Halak. Clearly, Israeli authorities have the wherewithal to conduct a thorough, comprehensive investigation.

That is what we expect in this case. In this case we expect that the perpetrators, those responsible for the death of Shireen – who, by the way, was a very close contact of our post and someone our people, someone presumably many of you knew quite well. It is —

QUESTION: She was with us in this room.

MR PRICE: And it is important to us —

QUESTION: You have to remember that.

MR PRICE: It is important to us that her legacy be honored, be protected, with accountability for those who senselessly took her life.

QUESTION: Well, you know on this police case that you cited – just bear with me, indulge me, my colleagues. In this case that you cited, you know that the Israelis charged the policemen something like maybe \$10 fine and so on. I don't want to delve into that. But you talked about Press Freedom Day last week, Press Freedom Day. You never mentioned the Palestinian journalists. There are 15 Palestinian journalists in prison – in prison. They are held there, as we say in Arabic, *zurán mwbitani*, which means falsely and malevolent. They have been held there day after day, year after year. They are disallowed from conducting their work, from doing their work, including colleagues of mine from my newspaper.

So I want you to respond to that. I mean, you talked about other things, which is laudable, which is great. Talk about what journalists face in Ukraine and other places. But you never mention what Palestinian journalists face.

MR PRICE: Said, we know what many Palestinian journalists have faced, and we've commented

quite a bit on that. You well remember what we said in the aftermath of the strike last year against the Associated Press building, against the Al Jazeera building in Gaza. We had an opportunity to speak to that publicly. Secretary Blinken had an opportunity to speak to the editor-in-chief of the Associated Press in the aftermath of that strike. We have spoken vociferously about the rights to a free press around the world, the fact that reporters should not be targeted, reporters should not be the objects of violence or suppression or repression anywhere around the world, whether that country is an autocracy, a democracy, whether that country is a friend or whether that country is a foe or competitor.

QUESTION: Let me just follow up on how journalists, Palestinian journalists, when there is an operation like this. The Israelis were about to storm the Jenin refugee camp. They go by, including the group that was with Shireen, including someone from my newspaper. They went by the Israelis that were standing right out there, and they said, "We're going right there." They told them just this morning, "We're going to go right there." So they knew perfectly. They knew exactly who was there and how clearly marked these people were.

So I want to hear from you if that – if – if ever the investigation shows the guilty party, should that guilty party be prosecuted to the full extent of the law?

MR PRICE: Those responsible for Shireen's killing should be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law, yes.

QUESTION: Ned, sorry, just really briefly since you brought it up, the bombing of the AP and the Al Jazeera office in Gaza, did you guys ever get an explanation from the Israelis that was satisfactory?

MR PRICE: We were in contact with the Israelis. They shared with us some of the information regarding that strike.

QUESTION: And did you think that it was a legit target?

MR PRICE: Clearly, the fact that there were the offices of at least two independent media organizations made it highly concerning, highly troubling to us. But beyond that —

QUESTION: Well, is it still troubling, or were your concerns resolved after what they told you?

MR PRICE: It is —

QUESTION: I mean, it's been almost – literally, that happened on May 15th of last year. It's now, what, May 11th. Or is it the 12th?

MR PRICE: It is – that assessment has not changed. It is —

QUESTION: Will you guys —

QUESTION: So you're still troubled by it? In other words, the explanation that the Israelis gave to you is not – it did not allay your —

MR PRICE: We voiced our concern by the fact that journalists were put at risk, that their offices came under assault.

QUESTION: I get that. But it's been a —

QUESTION: Will you send someone to the church —

QUESTION: But it's been a year, so I just want to know if the Israeli explanation has satisfied you and so those concerns are no – you don't have those concerns.

MR PRICE: Those concerns still exist, yes.

QUESTION: Will you send someone to the church on Friday for the service of Shireen in Gaza?

MR PRICE: I will check with post. As I know, as I relayed to you, she was a close contact of post. They were in regular contact with her. They valued her work. They valued in some cases a personal friendship and relationship with her. And if we have anything to say regarding representation, we'll let you know.

Francesco.

QUESTION: Has the Secretary spoken to any leader in Israel or the Palestinian side about this? And just on the record, do you have any early assessment or understanding of who did that?

MR PRICE: We're not going to prejudge an investigation. We've heard various statements throughout the day. Some of those statements have shifted. That's why we have called for a thorough, comprehensive investigation ending in accountability. There have been a number of conversations by senior officials in this building, senior officials at our embassy in Jerusalem, to both Israeli and Palestinian counterparts conveying many of the same messages I conveyed to you just now.

Yes.

QUESTION: Can I briefly ask about Hong Kong and Taiwan?

MR PRICE: Sure.

QUESTION: I still have something on Shireen, if I can.

MR PRICE: Let's take one more question on this, and then I'll come right back to you, Nike.

QUESTION: Can I have one question too, please?

MR PRICE: Okay. Go ahead.

QUESTION: Many press and human rights organizations are calling for international independent investigation into her killings, because they condemned Israeli maybe before that they're not going to thoroughly investigate themselves. Are you willing to support such efforts to turn this into an international investigation?

MR PRICE: Israel has the wherewithal and the capability to conduct a thorough, comprehensive investigation. They've done it before and we expect they'll do so in this case.

Yes.

QUESTION: Do you intend to conduct your own investigation or at least participate, since the lady or the – our colleagues, she is an American Palestinian. Because – because the record shows that Israeli investigation on those kind of incident haven't been reliable, so I wonder if you are planning to do your part of the investigation.

MR PRICE: Our role every time an American citizen is – passes overseas, whether that individual – however that individual succumbs, is to provide appropriate consular support. We'll be providing any necessary consular support in this case. But what we are calling for is an investigation – a comprehensive, a thorough investigation that ends with accountability.

Nike.

QUESTION: Yes. On Hong Kong, do you have anything on the arrest of the Catholic cardinal, Joseph Zen? And separately, if I may, can you recap the U.S. policy toward Taiwan? Does the U.S. support Taiwan independence? I'm asking because the Taiwan President Tsai has already said there is no need to declare Taiwan independence because Republic of China was established in 1912. Thank you.

MR PRICE: Thanks, Nike. We discussed this a bit yesterday, but let me just reiterate that our policy towards Taiwan has not changed. The United States remains committed to our longstanding "one China" policy which is guided by the Taiwan Relations Act, the Three U.S.-China Joint Communiques, and the Six Assurances.

To your question, we do not support Taiwan independence and we have repeatedly made this clear both in public and in private. Though the United States does not have diplomatic relations with Taiwan and does not support Taiwan independence, we do have, as you know, a robust unofficial relationship with Taiwan as well as an abiding interest in maintaining peace and stability across the Taiwan Straits.

In terms of Hong Kong, we – I expect we'll have more to say on this later today, but we do strongly condemn the arrests of Cardinal Joseph Zen, Margaret Ng, Hui Po-keung, and Denise Ho. In arresting these veteran activists, scholars, and religious leaders under the so-called National Security Law, Hong Kong authorities have again demonstrated that they will pursue all means necessary to stifle dissent and undercut protected rights and freedoms. We call for the immediate release of all of those who remain in custody, and of course, we continue to stand with the people of Hong Kong.

Janne.

QUESTION: Do you assess – do you assess the frequent deployment of Chinese PLA airplanes to

Taiwan Straits is sending the wrong message to the people of Taiwan and may actually push them to the direction that PRC does not want to see, which is trigger the Taiwanese independence movement?

MR PRICE: I will let the people on Taiwan remark on the implications of the PRC's actions. What I will say is that we have continued to voice our concern for these provocative operations. What we continue to call for is stability across the Taiwan Strait. We will continue to stand with our partner Taiwan. Our commitment to Taiwan is rock-solid, including in the face of acts of potential intimidation.

QUESTION: Taiwan? Can I —

QUESTION: Sorry, when you said you'll have more to say about the arrests later in the day, is that like some kind of a statement or —

MR PRICE: I expect we'll have some kind of a statement.

QUESTION: Like a written statement —

MR PRICE: Yes.

QUESTION: — from the Secretary? Okay. And then just the other – on the other thing on Taiwan, going back to our little discussion yesterday, when you say you do not support Taiwan independence, fine, but you sell them weapons. You send official delegations there, congressional delegations. You push —

MR PRICE: I can guess —

QUESTION: — for their inclusion – you push for their inclusion in international organizations as a —

MR PRICE: That don't require statehood as a criterion for membership, correct.

QUESTION: But as a – but as something separate from mainland China. So —

MR PRICE: In organizations that do not require statehood as a membership. You are speaking to everything that we do as part of our unofficial relationship with Taiwan that falls under the auspices

of our “one China” policy.

QUESTION: Right. So what I’m getting to is the WHO and the WHA this year, and you are pushing again, as I understand it, for Taiwan to be invited or to participate as an independent entity as a – not part of China. So how is that not supporting Taiwanese independence?

MR PRICE: These are two very separate things, Matt. We believe, on the one hand, that Taiwan’s —

QUESTION: First of all, you are, right?

MR PRICE: Excuse me, what?

QUESTION: You want the WHO to invite Taiwan as Taiwan?

MR PRICE: We support Taiwan’s robust and meaningful participation in international organizations that don’t require statehood as a criterion for participation or for membership.

QUESTION: Okay. So you are pushing for them to participate in the WHO?

MR PRICE: I don’t have any announcements today, but you’ve heard from us before that we push for Taiwan’s robust and meaningful participation in international organizations that don’t require statehood as a condition for membership. Taiwan is a leading democracy. The world has a lot to learn from our Taiwanese partners. Whether it is in the area of public health, whether it is in the area of economics, whether it’s in the area of climate change, we partner with the people on Taiwan, with our Taiwanese partners in a range of areas. We will continue to push for Taiwan’s meaningful participation, all within the bounds of our “one China” policy that has not changed.

QUESTION: Okay. So does the same apply for the Palestinians, that you push for them to be a part of and to participate in international fora that do not require statehood or —

MR PRICE: We are pushing – we are pushing for a two-state solution because we believe —

QUESTION: No, no, no, but I’m asking in the interim for – before that. So are you also pushing for the Palestinians to take part in international fora that —

MR PRICE: What we are pushing for, Matt, is a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

We believe that Israelis and Palestinians deserve equally to enjoy equal measures of safety, security, dignity – in the case of the Palestinians, and a state of their own.

Yes, Janne.

QUESTION: Thank you, Ned. I have a couple of question on China, North Korea, and South Korea.

First question: South Korean President Yoon said that – recently – he would provide drastic economic support to North Korea if it achieve substantial denuclearizations. On aid after North Korea has denuclearized first, how does it compare to the U.S. policy toward North Korea?

MR PRICE: Well, yesterday, I don't know that you were here, but we did offer congratulations to the new South Korean President Yoon Seok-youl on his inauguration. We made the point that the U.S.-ROK alliance is rooted in close friendship. It's the linchpin for peace, security, prosperity in the Indo-Pacific. And we have and will continue to coordinate closely with our treaty allies in the ROK across all variety of challenges and opportunities.

And of course, when it comes to challenges, there is no more pressing challenge than that posed by the DPRK's WMD programs, its nuclear weapons, its ballistic missile programs. We will, as I said, coordinate closely to address the threats that they pose. And the fact is that we share an objective together with our allies in the ROK, together with our allies in Japan. That is the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. How we get there, the steps, what that will look like is something we will continue to coordinate closely on with our allies in the ROK and Japan.

We know and we agree as allies that it will require principled dialogue and diplomacy. We have made very clear that we are willing to engage in good-faith diplomacy with the DPRK. We do so, of course, with no hostile intent. Our only intent is to see the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula in the interests of peace and security in the Indo-Pacific and beyond. So that's something we'll continue to discuss with our South Korean allies.

QUESTION: On China, Chinese Vice President Wang Qishan, who recently attended the inauguration ceremony of the South Korean President Yoon, made a remark that put pressure on South Korea. China is concerned about the – Yoon Seok-youl administration's strengthened U.S. and South Korea alliance. Do you know why China is concerned about strengthening the U.S. and South Korea alliance?

MR PRICE: I will let the PRC speak to that. I will say, for our part, we believe that the United States has a number of sources of strength in the world. One of them is our sources of strength here at home: our economy, the creativity, the vitality of our people, of our workforce. Another is our values and the principles, many of which we share with partners and allies around the world, and a third is very much that, our allies and partners around the world.

And we view our unprecedented systems – system of alliances and partnerships, including those we have in the Indo-Pacific, as a core source of strength. That is why Secretary Blinken, this department, has focused intently since day one of this administration on repairing, rebuilding, revitalizing those alliances, knowing, as Secretary Blinken often likes to say, that there is no challenge that the United States could take on more effectively alone than with our closest allies and partners. And that's what we've sought to do.

Yes.

QUESTION: Last one: Will the North Korea issues be discussing at the U.S. and ASEAN summit?

MR PRICE: There's a lot that we have to discuss with our ASEAN partners. This is a region of the world that is among the most dynamic. It is the fastest growing region of the world. It is one where the United States is making clear we have an abiding commitment and interest in. The fact that this leader-level summit is taking place in Washington, D.C., the fact that it has not taken place in recent years, I think, underscores our commitment to Southeast Asia, to ASEAN centrality. There will be a number of topics that we're going to discuss, including shared interests, combating COVID, economic recovery, climate, security challenges in the region, as well as our shared values. So all of that will be on the agenda. We'll have more to say in the coming days.

Rich.

QUESTION: Ned, just one follow-up on Taiwan.

MR PRICE: Sure, sure.

QUESTION: Is it still your position that the changes to the fact sheet on Taiwan have nothing to do with the timing of Secretary Blinken's speech on China or what had been planned to be his speech on China?

MR PRICE: That is our position. As you know, the Secretary was scheduled to deliver remarks on our approach to the PRC last week, and that was separate and apart from routine updates to a fact sheet.

QUESTION: One more on Taiwan?

MR PRICE: Sure.

QUESTION: The Taiwanese defense ministry in recent days has talked about some of the deliveries of U.S. weapons being delayed. Are all of the other U.S. weapons that have been notified to Congress and are in progress going to Taiwan – are all of those other systems set to be delivered on time?

MR PRICE: Well, let me say our defense relationship with Taiwan remains based on an assessment of Taiwan's defense needs and the threat posed by the PRC. Continuing to pursue systems that will not meaningfully contribute to an effective defense strategy, we believe it's inconsistent with an evolving security threat that Taiwan faces, and we strongly support Taiwan's efforts to implement an asymmetric defense strategy. As you know, we have continued to provide Taiwan with the security assistance that together we deem most necessary. I don't – I can't give you an update on the pace of those deliveries, but if there's anything additional we can share, we will.

QUESTION: Do you – sorry, do you guys not specifically track the pace of those deliveries? What is U.S. policy about when you want those deliveries to get there? I mean, I know it's sort of out of your hands once it goes to the companies that are producing these weapons. But surely you guys are focused on this. So when do you want those weapons to get to Taiwan?

MR PRICE: Well, our – we want to see those systems delivered to Taiwan just as soon as they need them, and that is based on a need assessment and a needs assessment. It is something that we routinely do with our Taiwanese counterparts. I'll say that air defense systems and artillery, these are critical to supporting Taiwan's self-defense. The swift provision of Taiwan defensive weaponry and sustainment via our FMF, our Foreign Military Sales, and our direct commercial sales, or DCS, we believe is essential for Taiwan's security and we'll continue to work with industry to support that goal based in part on the assessment that I mentioned before. Since 2017, the Executive Branch has notified Congress of over \$18 billion in arms sales to Taiwan. Of course, we can't provide details on ongoing defense procurement discussions, but those discussions regarding Taiwan's needs are

constantly ongoing.

QUESTION: And just a final question on this. Ukraine – the Ukraine war. Has the deliveries of weapons to Ukraine at all impacted the scheduled deliveries of weapons to Taiwan, as far as you know?

MR PRICE: These are two very different security challenges. The vast majority of emergency military assistance to Ukraine is being delivered via the presidential drawdown authority that you've heard from. That is to say it's being directly delivered out of DOD inventories. Taiwan, on the other hand, its defense procurements of defensive weaponry and sustainment are conducted via FMS, the Foreign Military Sales, and the direct commercial sales, which are subject to the standard contracting and manufacturing process.

QUESTION: Ned, off the top of your head, how many other non-state entities do you guys sell weapons to for self-defense?

MR PRICE: We'll come back to you if we have anything to add.

QUESTION: In other words, none?

MR PRICE: I don't know if there's another example, Matt, to your question.

Yeah.

QUESTION: A follow-up?

QUESTION: Ned.

MR PRICE: Sure. Ukraine?

QUESTION: Yes. I wonder if you had any comment on this idea of a Marshall Plan-style plan for rebuilding Ukraine. The top – president of the European Investment Bank sort of today pledged support for that, said the EU's lending arm would back that. But they're also saying they want to make sure that Europe is not left alone and make sure the U.S. contributes to that. Is that – is there a plan in place to get involved with that as a joint effort with the Europeans?

MR PRICE: It's something that we are absolutely prepared to take part in. We have led the world already, and, of course, we have a legislative proposal that is awaiting action before Congress when it comes to more immediate support to the people and the Government of Ukraine. So we are very much focused on the near term, but we haven't lost sight of the longer term, and it is our hope that we will be in a position to help the Ukrainian Government, the Ukrainian people rebuild and reconstruct in the near term. Of course, the first order of business is bringing this – Russia's aggression to a close. We're focused on that. We are focused on providing economic support to the Government of Ukraine in the meantime. We're focused on providing humanitarian support to the people of Ukraine in the meantime. And we're focused on providing security assistance to Ukraine in the interim as well.

But when there is an opportunity to help rebuild Ukraine to emerge from the destruction that the Kremlin has wrought across parts of the country, the United States will be there for that as well.

QUESTION: And separately, the Russians announced today a list of companies that they're sanctioning, energy companies, including subsidiaries of Gazprom in parts of Europe. Do you have any response to that? Does that impact your efforts on energy and keeping gas prices down?

MR PRICE: No, I don't have any response to that. What we are doing is focusing with our allies and partners, very similar to what we're doing in the other context we just discussed, on the near term and providing our allies and partners, including those in Europe, with the energy supply that they need in the interim. We're doing that through – with a coordinated release from various strategic petroleum reserves around the world. We are doing that by surging energy supplies, working with partners around the world, as we look towards the longer term. And over the longer term, it is about lessening our reliance, lessening our collective dependence on Russian energy sources, lessening our dependence on fossil fuels in general so that countries around the world, whether they're in Europe or elsewhere, cannot be held hostage, cannot be subject to Moscow or any other country attempting to use energy as a weapon.

Yes.

QUESTION: The White House has repeatedly said that Vladimir Putin doesn't have a way out right now, while experts have said a cornered Putin is a dangerous Putin. Is the State Department providing a clear offramp through diplomacy, and if it's not, when is the time to do that?

MR PRICE: Well, you mentioned the offramp yourself. The offramp is very simple, it's straightforward – it's genuine diplomacy. The State Department, this administration, provided an offramp well before President Putin decided to launch this war against Ukraine. I made this point the other day, but many of us in fact were with us when we traveled to locations around the world working bilaterally with Russian counterparts, but also working multilaterally through the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, working multilaterally through the NATO-Russia Council, in an effort to forestall what was then our concern: that Vladimir Putin would go forward with his war against Ukraine.

Once he did make that decision, the offramp of diplomacy, it has not closed. What has not been the case, however, is there has not been a Russian partner, there has not been a Russian negotiator, that has had inclination or the ability to engage in good-faith diplomacy and dialogue with their Ukrainian counterparts. We know from our Ukrainian counterparts that they are ready, willing, and able to engage in the type of diplomacy that we believe must be the offramp that you've spoken of.

Russia has heretofore shown no indication that they are as of yet ready to accept that offramp. So in the interim, we are going to continue to do what has demonstrably proven effective. We are going to continue to provide our Ukrainian partners with the defensive security assistance they need to continue to fend off some of these vicious attacks, to continue to protect their freedom, to protect their democracy, to protect their independence, and to protect their homeland. All the while, we're going to continue to mount economic costs and financial costs on the Kremlin and all of those who are enabling this war of choice. Because that's what it is.

It's awfully ironic to speak of the party that is engaging in a war of choice of not accepting an offramp. The offramp is clear, it has been clear. The Kremlin's choice has been to wage war, just not to pursue that offramp just yet. That is why we're doing everything we can through supporting our Ukrainian partners and holding Russian officials, and Belarusian officials for that matter, accountable to change that decision-making calculus, to incentivize a – the start, the initiation of good-faith diplomacy and dialogue that we believe, that our Ukrainian partners believe can diminish the violence and lead to an end to this war.

QUESTION: Ned, can I follow up on that?

MR PRICE: Sure.

QUESTION: I have another question later on Azerbaijan. But there was a meeting between Ambassador Sullivan and Ryabkov today. Can you fill us in about who initiated the meeting, and also was there any specific message that you want to deliver? And if you can, how much was coordinated with the Ukrainians? Because that was our policy, that we should not talk about Ukraine without Ukraine.

MR PRICE: That absolutely is our policy, nothing about Ukraine without Ukraine. I can confirm that in this case, our bilateral ambassador to Russia, Ambassador Sullivan, met with Russian Government officials today. It was a prescheduled meeting to discuss a narrow set of bilateral issues.

So to your question, Ambassador Sullivan is discussing issues in the bilateral relationship with his Russian counterparts. Those tend to be quite narrow. In many cases, those tend to be centered on the functioning of our embassy, which of course is a concern to us given the limitations – the undue limitations that the Russian Government has imposed on the operations of our embassy in Moscow.

We do maintain diplomatic communications with the Russian Federation through our Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs and through our embassy in Moscow. There is no doubt that it is a difficult relationship; that is clear to everyone. But we do believe that these lines of communication should remain open.

QUESTION: Just to clarify, there was a speculation that there was a connection between that meeting and also Russia summoning Polish ambassador. These are separate – two separate issues?

MR PRICE: The – I'm sorry, the Russians doing what?

QUESTION: Connections between that meeting and Russians summoning the Polish ambassador in Moscow. That was on —

MR PRICE: I would need to defer to our Polish allies to speak to their interaction, but —

QUESTION: Okay. And on Azerbaijan, I have seen the readout between the – on the call between the Secretary and President Aliyev. One of the topics is human rights, and there's several cases in the past couple months here, most recently journalist Aytan Mammadova, also attack against

human rights defender Bakhtiyar Hajiyevev, and also arrest of opposition party leader Ali Aliyev. These are specific cases that perhaps this call was a chance to raise by the Secretary. Did the Secretary have a chance to raise specific cases or it was just overall about human rights concerns?

MR PRICE: I will leave the specific contents of the call to the call itself. As you noted, we did issue a readout. It was just last week, I believe, that we had a Strategic Dialogue, the U.S.-Armenia Strategic Dialogue. So Secretary Blinken's discussion today with President Aliyev was an opportunity to discuss some of the positive momentum and the future concrete steps on the path to peace in the South Caucasus. That includes some of the issues we discussed with our Armenian partners last week: border delimitation and demarcation, opening transport and communication links, and the release of the remaining Armenian detainees.

He did reiterate, as you saw, that we stand ready to help by engaging bilaterally as well as with likeminded partners, including through our role as an OSCE Minsk Group co-chair, to help the parties find a long-term, comprehensive peace. He did, as you note, also highlight the importance of increased respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. That is something that we also had an opportunity to discuss with our Armenian partners last week.

QUESTION: Okay. You mentioned positive momentum on Karabakh. Is there any concern at all on your end that Russians might jeopardize whatever positive connection is going on, as they have done before?

MR PRICE: Forging what we are seeking to forge here, a long-term, comprehensive peace, happens to be in our interest. It also happens to be in Moscow's interest. Moscow, of course, is a part of the OSCE Minsk Group as well.

Yes, yes.

QUESTION: So coming off the question earlier about the lack of an offramp, the slog, the fact that this war is going to grind on for a very long time as far as we can tell, is there already discussions beyond the 40 billion that's before Congress for more?

MR PRICE: Well, this 40 billion, the proposal that is before Congress at the moment, is for the remainder of the fiscal year. So it is for a finite period. It, of course, is our hope, it is our goal to see to it that this war comes to a close just as soon as can be managed. And so that is why we have

asked for these resources, to continue to advance our strategy, to support our Ukrainian partners, to impose additional costs on the Russians so that we can help bring that about. If that strategy continues to be successful, the war, of course, we hope will be – it will be shorter in duration. That of course will help us request fewer funds over time. So our goal is to bring this war to a close and to see to it that we can turn to the task of rebuilding and working together with our Ukrainian partners on that task.

QUESTION: You'll recall the fiscal year ends at the end of September, which is four months from now. We're talking \$10 billion a month.

MR PRICE: And, Matt, our point —

QUESTION: Right? I just want to make sure we're talking – that's what we're talking about.

MR PRICE: That's what the math says, yes.

QUESTION: Yeah?

MR PRICE: And our point —

QUESTION: When you talk about the end of this fiscal year, you're talking about the current fiscal year, which ends in September?

MR PRICE: That – you've —

QUESTION: Okay. Can I —

MR PRICE: But let me just make the other point: the alternative would be much costlier. The alternative to doing nothing in the face of aggression, to doing nothing in the face of what we're facing in terms of global food supply, what we are facing in terms of the broader implications of Russia's war and what indifference or what inaction could spell around the world, that would be far costlier.

QUESTION: Okay. I wasn't trying to cast aspersions on it.

MR PRICE: You never are.

QUESTION: I just want to make sure the timeline was correct. Back to Ambassador Sullivan's meeting. Did the cases of the remaining American detainees come up? Did he raise them? I'm sure you're aware that – I believe Brittney Griner has a hearing coming up, a court hearing on the 19th, so next week. Is there any movement? Did he raise them? Did he get any response?

MR PRICE: And I am sure you are aware that we just don't discuss these elements in public.

QUESTION: Well, did he raise the cases of —

MR PRICE: I've – I'm – you —

QUESTION: Without naming names.

MR PRICE: You know that we don't even go that far. I've made this point before, but in the days and the weeks and the months prior to the release of Trevor Reed, we did not discuss the specifics of our efforts beyond saying that securing the release of Americans who are wrongfully held around the world is of paramount importance to us, and it's something we're always working on.

Michel.

QUESTION: May I?

MR PRICE: Let me move around a little bit, Said.

QUESTION: No, no, I just want to — on this point, you just mentioned that you want to bring the war to an end. You'd like to see this war brought to an end as soon as possible. If as a part of that strategy were for you to, say, announce that you are willing to discuss Russia's concerns, including the expansion of NATO or the non-expansion of NATO to countries like Ukraine and Georgia and Finland and so on as a part of that, would you do this as a peace offering?

MR PRICE: Two separate issues. Before Vladimir Putin chose to wage this war, we made very clear that we were prepared to discuss some of the purported concerns that Russia had put on the table. And there were concrete steps – or at least there were concrete discussions – that we thought were in the offing that would advance the security of the transatlantic community, that is to say the United States and our European allies and partners, as well as to address some of the stated

concerns of Moscow. Of course, Russia rejected that. And if you might recall, they went to war on February 24th before even responding to the written proposal that we had put forward.

When it comes to NATO, Said, we have been very clear that for us NATO's "open door" means an open door. That is important, and it is something for us that is non-negotiable.

Said – or Michel.

QUESTION: Any updates on the talks with Iran?

MR PRICE: No updates to offer. We are still in the same place since we last talked about it. It is still our assessment that if we were able to achieve a mutual return to compliance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, that it would manifestly be in our national security interest because it would once again put permanent and verifiable limits on Iran's nuclear program, a program that has been in many ways unconstrained since 2018 and a program that has galloped forward in ways that are unacceptable to us. We don't have any more to share than what we discussed last time.

Simon.

QUESTION: Could —

QUESTION: One more?

MR PRICE: Sorry, let me move around. Courtney and then Ysef. Or do you want to stay in Iran? Yes.

QUESTION: A follow-up on Michel. So does that mean that you don't have any readout from Enrique Mora from his first day in Tehran?

MR PRICE: I am confident that our team will be in touch with Enrique Mora and his team. Of course, he is still on the ground, but Enrique Mora has been conveying messages back and forth. That is the role he's been playing for some time. I am confident that our team will have an opportunity to discuss his time on the ground with him. I am also confident that we probably won't be able to share much of that dialogue.

QUESTION: Yeah, but just one reminder. The last communication exchanged, was it from

Washington to Tehran or Tehran to Washington?

MR PRICE: We have not given a play-by-play of the diplomacy. And once again, we are not in direct communication with Iran. Of course, we've made clear that it would in some ways facilitate diplomacy if we were in a position to have direct discussions with Tehran so that we weren't reliant on a middleman, an especially capable middleman in this case in the form of Enrique Mora. But regardless, we're not going to detail a play-by-play.

Courtney.

QUESTION: Just to return to Simon's earlier question about rebuilding efforts for Ukraine. Is it the administration's policy that you do not want to commit funds to such an effort until Russian forces are completely out of the country? Or —

MR PRICE: It's our policy that we want to continue with a strategy that has proven demonstrably effective, and right now we are investing, and investing heavily, in that strategy. That's why the legislative package that is before the Hill is primarily comprised of security assistance, security assistance that to date has been a key enabling facet of the effectiveness that our Ukrainian partners have been able to achieve on the battlefield. But it also has economic assistance, it has humanitarian assistance, it has assistance in the realm of food security as well.

Clearly, there will be a need – and we hope a need before long – to reconstruct and to rebuild, and the United States will be there for that task as well.

QUESTION: Some of those efforts are ongoing even as the war continues. Is your position that you would wait to dedicate U.S. funding for that purpose until after the war ends?

MR PRICE: Well, we're providing – we're seeking – we have provided and we're seeking to provide economic assistance. We've provided direct budgetary assistance, and of course, our Ukrainian partners have great discretion in terms of what they do with that.

Yes.

QUESTION: Can I go back to Asia?

MR PRICE: Sure.

QUESTION: I'd like to ask about Indo-Pacific Economic Framework, so-called IPEF. Japanese ambassador to the United States said the Biden administration will launch Indo-Pacific Economic Framework during the time of the President Biden's visit to Japan. Firstly, can you confirm it? And secondly, is the Biden administration eventually willing to replace Trans-Pacific Partnership, the so-called TPP, with Indo-Pacific Economic Framework?

MR PRICE: So of course, I don't want to get ahead of the President's travel to Japan. Secretary Blinken, when he was in Jakarta, Indonesia in December of last year, he did deliver a speech on our Indo-Pacific strategy, and there were key elements to that strategy. And deepening our economic ties with the region were a clear element of that strategy, and I suspect you'll be hearing more about that before too long.

When it comes to the TPP, this is something that our – that my – still my current colleague at the White House has spoken to before. It was last September, I believe, when she said that the President has been clear he would not rejoin the TPP as it was initially put forward. We know a lot has changed in the world since 2016. We are evaluating our options to deepen our economic partnerships with countries in the —

QUESTION: But he supported it when it was initially proposed, right? When he was the vice president?

MR PRICE: The White House has been clear that the President has been clear he would not rejoin the TPP —

QUESTION: Yeah, but when he was the vice president, he supported it.

MR PRICE: — as it was initially put forward.

QUESTION: Right, when it was initially put forward —

MR PRICE: Simon.

QUESTION: — he was vice president, and he supported it. Correct? Right or not?

MR PRICE: Matt, I am telling you – I am telling you what – I am telling you what our policy is.

Yes.

QUESTION: I wanted to come to the Philippines. You said yesterday it was too early to comment, so wanted to kind of ask again specific – I guess particularly because the ASEAN Summit is happening this week, and part of the focus of that is obviously – is obviously towards China or showing your prioritization of the region in the light of your broader China policy, I guess, or Indo-Pacific policy. But specifically, do you have any concerns that the new president-elect, Marcos Jr., represents a challenge to U.S. policy in the region, specifically with his comments, I believe during the campaign, talking about the 2016 ruling on – the UNCLOS ruling that he said this is not effective, and he said he's going to seek a bilateral agreement with China to resolve their dispute in the South China Sea. How does that square with what the U.S. wants to do with this region?

MR PRICE: Simon, this applies to the Philippines, it applies to everywhere around the world: We will judge and we will operate within the confines of our bilateral relationship based on what happens once an individual or a party is in office. And when it comes to Ferdinand Marcos Jr., you heard from the Secretary earlier today that we congratulated him, we congratulated the people of the Philippines on their successful election. We look forward to working with the president-elect to strengthen the enduring alliance between our two countries. It's a special partnership that is rooted in a long and deeply interwoven history of shared values, shared interests, and strong people-to-people ties. We'll continue to collaborate closely with the Philippines to promote respect for human rights and to advance a free, open, connected, prosperous, secure, and resilient Indo-Pacific.

That will be at the top of our agenda. We look forward to seeing Foreign Minister Locsin when he is here at the ASEAN Summit later this week, and I suspect that we will be able to engage with the incoming Marcos government in the near term.

QUESTION: And specifically on the 2016 ruling, is that – does the U.S. still see that as relevant to resolving the South China Sea disputes?

MR PRICE: We still stand by that ruling. We issued a statement not all that long ago underscoring that the South China Sea, as we know, contains some of the world's busiest shipping lanes, trillions of dollars in merchant shipping transit annually. We have to remain vigilant to any effort to unlawfully restrict navigational rights and freedoms in this vital waterway. It serves as a lifeline to so

many economies. And we reaffirm our statement of July of last year regarding the maritime claims in the South China Sea, and we stand by that.

QUESTION: Ned, I must admit that I don't expect a whole lot of an answer from this, but given the history here, the United States and the Philippines and the fact that the United States played such a pivotal role in the ouster of Bongbong Marcos's father, do you have any concerns about the return of the family?

MR PRICE: Matt, as I just said to Simon, we look forward to working with the incoming government —

QUESTION: So in other words, no?

MR PRICE: We have – we know that we have an enduring, shared values and shared interests. It is at the top of our agenda, and we expect at the top – it's at the top of the agenda of the incoming administration in Manila to work to advance this.

QUESTION: So the – so you're prepared to, like, start on a fresh page?

MR PRICE: We —

QUESTION: And the history doesn't matter?

MR PRICE: Our bilateral relationships are contoured by what happens when individuals, parties come to office.

QUESTION: Can I have one more that I also expect this is going to be very brief, and that is I – we saw the joint statement out of the Marrakech, the anti-ISIS meeting, and I just want to know if you guys have anything that – if you have anything to add to it, or if there's anything in particular that you wanted to highlight from this that you thought was a particular success or a particular accomplishment.

MR PRICE: Well, our Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Toria Nuland is there representing us. There was a joint statement release. She did have an opportunity to speak to – before the cameras earlier today. It's my understanding that she spoke to some of the salient points of that

discussion. But again, I'd point you to that joint statement.

QUESTION: Sorry, one more on Marcos.

MR PRICE: Sure.

QUESTION: Just – could you just state whether the president-elect is welcome in the United States? He hasn't visited I think for 15 years given he and his mother are facing this court ruling, I think in Hawaii. Is the new president of the Philippines welcome in the U.S.?

MR PRICE: We look forward to engaging with the incoming Marcos administration, again, to pursue those shared interests and those shared values.

Thank you very much. Thanks.

QUESTION: Thank you.

(The briefing was concluded at 3:25 p.m.)

Department Press Briefing – May 10, 2022

2:02 p.m. EDT

MR PRICE: Good afternoon. We'll do something extraordinary today and start on time, and also without a topper. So dangerous as that might be, I'll turn right to your questions. Daphne.

QUESTION: Ukraine has said it would suspend the flow of gas through a transit point that delivers almost a third of the fuel piped from Russia to Europe through Ukraine. Will the U.S. need to increase LNG exports to Europe given this move, and does it change the timeline at all for more U.S. or EU tightened sanctions on Russian energy?

MR PRICE: Well, it doesn't change one timeline, and that is the timeline associated with lessening global dependence on Russian oil. And the timeline associated with that is as soon as possible. As you know, the United States, countries around the world, have already taken steps – the United States took steps last month through an executive order – to ban the import of Russian oil, of Russian energy. Other countries have followed suit using their own authorities. Blocs of countries are having these discussions about how best they can do that.

So I think what we've heard today only reinforces what we already knew. We knew that there has to be a near-term response to the disruptions in the global energy market that President Putin's

invasion of Ukraine has caused. And as you've heard from us in recent weeks, we have been in close coordination, in close touch with allies and partners around the world to surge energy supplies, in some cases tapping strategic petroleum reserves – in the case of the United States, tens of millions of barrels from our strategic petroleum reserve; other countries have made similar investments in their own strategic petroleum reserves – to ensure that supplies of energy are where they need to be for countries that need it in this interim period.

And I call it an interim period because our goal over the longer term is to see to it that we take steps to lessen dependence on Russian energy. Part of that is going to be the transition away from fossil fuels towards renewables, towards green technology; that will help with that. But part of that, too, will be finding longer-term sustainable ways to ensure that our partners, especially those partners on the front lines who have found themselves over the course of years or even decades reliant on Russian energy flows, to see to it that they have other options to fulfill their energy needs. So that's something we're working on, including in the context of the U.S.-EU energy task force that President Biden established with his European counterpart a number of weeks ago.

Francesco.

QUESTION: I have a quick one on Ukraine. Senators Graham and Blumenthal introduced a resolution today asking the Secretary to designate Russia as a state sponsor of terrorism. Can you update us on the process, if there is one, to determine whether Russia will qualify as a state sponsor of terrorism? Is that something you're —

MR PRICE: Aware of that resolution, aware of Congress's interest in this matter, and of course of Congress's broader interest in our approach to Russia and Ukraine. What I can say is that the state sponsor of terrorism statute is a statute, not to be too subtle about it. And that means that it is something – the criteria by which states are designated or not, those are not up to us. Those are up to Congress.

What is up to us is to take a close look at the law, to take a close look at the facts – that is to say, what Russia is doing, whether it's in Ukraine, whether it's in countries around the world – to determine whether that fact pattern fits the criteria that is laid out in the statute. So that's something that we're always looking at, not only with this authority but with every authority that we have.

The broader point is that we are going to pull every appropriate level – lever, excuse me – we can to apply pressure on the Russian Federation until and unless its brutal invasion of Ukraine, its brutal aggression against Ukraine, comes to a halt. And the fact is that together with dozens of countries across four continents, we have applied our own sanctions, we've used international authorities as well, to not only apply sanctions, but also export controls.

And so the practical effect is that much of what various authorities call for have already been put in place, given what we've already done vis-à-vis our own authorities and what other countries have done in terms of their authorities. But we'll continue to watch and to determine whether Russia's actions in Ukraine merit and qualify for additional authorities. If we feel those authorities are appropriate, we won't hesitate to apply them.

QUESTION: Does that just mean that at this stage, it doesn't qualify, it doesn't meet the criteria?

MR PRICE: We're always looking at the facts and the law, and we'll continue to do that.

QUESTION: Can you talk a little bit about terrorism designations in general, whether they are FTO designations or state sponsor designations? And will you – are you willing to say what a lot of people say privately, which is it's just a bit of show, and in terms of the two cases that we're looking at right now, the IRGC and Russia, that in fact most if not all of what could be done if these designations were, one, kept, or added, would be exactly the same as what you – this administration and previous administrations have already been doing?

MR PRICE: Well, I think your point is well taken, that there are various authorities we can use when it comes to the IRGC, to take that one example. It is an entity that is among the most heavily sanctioned entities on the face of the planet. In addition to the FTO, there are a number of other authorities that are used to constrain and constrict its activities and those of its leadership and its proxies as well. I used this data point the other day.

But of the 107 sanctions the Biden administration has imposed on Iran, 86 of those – some three-quarters – have been applied against the IRGC or its proxies. So the fact is that we do have a number of tools, but whether it's the SST, whether it's the FTO designation, both of these things are defined by statute. And —

QUESTION: Well, yeah. Understood. But, I mean, isn't the administration a little bit frustrated that

people seem to be making political points out of this – out of both of these things?

MR PRICE: Matt, we're cognizant of the town we live in.

QUESTION: And?

MR PRICE: I – we are closely examining the facts and the law with all of these things. That applies equally to the state sponsor of terrorism designation as it does to the FTO.

QUESTION: Well, but for people who have been around for a long time, including those in this building, including the advisor's office and others, do you think either of these decisions, they go the way that the critics suspect they will? That it won't make any difference at all?

MR PRICE: I don't know what the critics – what they expect. What I do know is that we are going to follow the law. We're going to do what's in our national security interest when it comes to every authority under the sun and whether the target of those authorities is Iran, Russia, any other state actor, or non-state actor.

But since you have raised Congress, I will walk through this open door and point out the fact that our assistance to Ukraine has been, just as we promised, massive. We have provided \$4.5 billion worth of security assistance to Ukraine since the start of this administration, some \$3.8 billion worth of security assistance since the invasion began. These are supplies, weapons, that – precisely what Ukraine needs to defend itself. We started doing this well in advance of the Russian invasion. We started doing it last summer. We did it again in December in advance of the invasion, and of course we have announced multiple drawdowns during the course of this invasion. We are now at our ninth presidential drawdown.

The fact, however, is that right now our coffers in terms of drawdown funding, they are dwindling, and after providing \$3.8 billion worth of security assistance since the start of the invasion, we now have less than \$100 million left. And we will exhaust those funds within the next week.

And so Secretary Blinken, together with Secretary Austin, they have conveyed a very simple message to congressional leadership. The message is: We need your help. We need Congress's help to see to it that the strategy that President Biden pledged before Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the strategy we have pursued in the midst of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and the strategy that has

proved effective in helping our Ukrainian partners be effective at defending their country, that is a strategy that requires funding and a strategy for which funding will be exhausted in key ways as of next week.

We view the request that is before Congress now, the supplemental budget request, as vital in terms of what these funds will enable us to do, as well as the message they would send in terms of bipartisan support, in terms of the Executive Branch, the Hill, Americans of all stripes, for the people of Ukraine who are waging this fight to preserve their freedom, to preserve their democracy, and to preserve their country.

This additional assistance we've requested, the brunt of our supplemental emergency request was in fact for security assistance, precisely what our Ukrainian partners need to defend themselves. That includes artillery, armored vehicles, advanced air defense systems, all for Ukraine. This funding will also go beyond the security realm. It will help Ukraine keep schools open. It will help replenish the – and stockpile in support of U.S. troops on NATO territory. It will help our Ukrainian partners, and also our NATO Allies, do precisely what we feel it is imperative that they be positioned to do at this moment.

Nazira.

QUESTION: I don't remember asking about the assistance, but thank you for the four-minute exposition.

MR PRICE: Before you arrived, and I will point out that you arrived late, for the cameras —

QUESTION: I did.

MR PRICE: — I said there would be no topper, so I wanted to make up for that.

QUESTION: Fair enough.

MR PRICE: Yes. Nazira.

QUESTION: Thank you, Mr. Price. First of all, thank you very much for yesterday's – your answer. Afghan women, they are so happy. But they still ask me and ask you that what option United States

will bring to Taliban if they didn't fix themselves about women's job. This is regular job that every Afghan does it, we don't have any problem, but like that, it's unacceptable for Afghan women. And also Afghan people ask, based off your opinion: Why United States failed to fix Afghanistan during this 20 years? Thank you, sir.

MR PRICE: Thank you. So let me start by following up on the conversation we had yesterday about some of the very disturbing, very concerning edicts we've heard from the Taliban. Of course, what we've heard in recent days regarding the requirement for women's attire, what we've heard about the restrictions on girls attending secondary schools, and other steps – all of these have been deeply concerning. And it's not only concerning to us; in some ways, much more importantly, it is much more important that it is deeply concerning to Afghans across their country, across Afghanistan. They have voiced their opposition to this edict that proposes severe limitations on half of Afghanistan's population, and that effectively limits and constricts the ability of half of Afghanistan's population to participate fully in Afghan society.

So combined with the continuing ban on girls' secondary education, restrictions on freedom of movement and targeting of peaceful protesters, the Taliban's policies towards women are an affront to human rights and they will continue to impair their – the Taliban's relations with the international community, including with the United States. We are discussing these developments with our partners around the world. The legitimacy and support the Taliban seeks from the international community, they know that it depends on their conduct, including and centrally their protection on the rights of women and girls.

These are commitments that the Taliban has made privately. These are commitments, again, much more importantly, that they have made publicly to their own people, and these are the commitments on which we are going to base and we are going to judge any future relationship that we will have with the Taliban. And we know that other countries feel similarly. Other countries with whom we've worked closely on Afghanistan since August of last year and well before August of last year do feel similarly.

In the interim, we've paused nearly all senior-level engagement with the Taliban in response to the Taliban's decision in March to prevent girls from attending secondary education. We do remain concerned about these other restrictions that we talked about. We believe, first and foremost, that the Taliban should respond to the Afghan people whose rights the Taliban have pledged, once

again, publicly to respect. We have heard that very message from our Afghan partners in recent days. Tom West, our special representative for Afghanistan; Rina Amiri, our special representative for Afghan – for women and girls; Ian McCary, our representative who is now based on Doha, have heard that message from Afghan interlocutors in recent days.

Our Afghan partners tell us that they have seen a disturbing pattern of restrictions on their rights that doesn't reflect the cultural diversity or their hopes for Afghanistan's future. It also doesn't reflect what they heard, what the world heard from the Taliban. This, of course, brings back painful memories of the Taliban from the 1990s. We remain, as I said before, in close communication with our allies and partners regarding our shared concern with what we've seen. And again, the Taliban's responsiveness to the demands of the Afghan people and to the expectations of the international community will define not only our relationship with the Taliban, but the world's relationship with the Taliban. We know that we cannot have a normal relationship with the Taliban until they respect fully the rights of all of the people of Afghanistan.

Yes.

QUESTION: Hold on. So what are you going to do? Can I ask – re-ask my question from yesterday? So what are you going to do? I don't understand. I mean, I saw that some people wrote, oh, U.S. says it's going to take measures to – if the Taliban doesn't reverse these decisions, but what measures have you taken or are you going to take? And you haven't taken any, even though they have done these offensive things that you say going back more than a month now. So what exactly are you going to do and why should anyone believe you when you say we're going to punish the Taliban or we're going to take steps to make our disapproval clear?

MR PRICE: First, Matt, we have led the world, as you know, in providing humanitarian relief and humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan.

QUESTION: You have, but you also led the world in withdrawing —

MR PRICE: So I think our credibility when it comes to —

QUESTION: — from Afghanistan and allowing the Taliban to take control then, right?

MR PRICE: — when it comes to the concern of – when it comes to the humanitarian concerns of the

Afghan people, I think we have established our leadership on that.

QUESTION: Did the United States lead the world in withdrawing from Afghanistan and allowing the Taliban to take control again?

MR PRICE: Matt —

QUESTION: Yes or no? Yes, right? I mean, you can't deny that, can you?

MR PRICE: I would absolutely reject the premise of the question that the United States allowed the Taliban to take the capital. And Matt, we can relitigate questions that have been litigated for the past 20 years about an investment that we have made in a country, including with treasure and, more importantly, bloodshed on the part of this country and the assessment of this President that the presence of some 2,500 troops who would once again be involved in a civil war, who would be targeted, who would have a target on their back not only by the Taliban but also by elements like ISIS-K, a 2,500-strong contingent that would not – in the end – would have been able to prevent the Taliban or any larger force from coming to power.

So you can argue with the decision that the President made to withdraw militarily from Afghanistan. We are confident in that decision. We know what's in our national interest. We also know what we can accomplish without having a contingent of military – a military deployment on foreign soil. And that's what we're trying to do with our humanitarian assistance. The humanitarian assistance that we have provided to the people of Afghanistan since August of last year has led the world, just as our provision of humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan prior to August of last year has led the world.

QUESTION: But this administration has always – has also said that human rights is its number one or one of its top priorities in terms of foreign policy, and —

MR PRICE: Central to our foreign policy.

QUESTION: Exactly. It doesn't seem to be so central here.

MR PRICE: It is central —

QUESTION: Other than you —

MR PRICE: It is – it is —

QUESTION: — continuing to make statements and that —

MR PRICE: Matt, but you seem to be accusing us of what the Taliban is doing to the people of Afghanistan, and —

QUESTION: No, no, I'm not accusing anyone of anything. I'm asking you what you're doing to —

MR PRICE: And I am telling you – I am telling you we are doing —

QUESTION: — prevent this or to show your displeasure other than coming out with —

QUESTION: Saying it.

QUESTION: — saying it, writing a nasty letter.

MR PRICE: I can assure you we are doing more than saying it. We are —

QUESTION: Okay. There's been a lot of talk about reopening the embassy in Kyiv. Is there any discussion about going – sending people back to Kabul?

MR PRICE: I am not aware of any discussion right now about reopening the embassy in Kabul.

QUESTION: Okay. Is it your – is it your belief, though, that Kabul is a war zone in the same way that Kyiv —

MR PRICE: There – there are a couple elements we look at. Safety and security is always at the top of that list. We also look at the propriety of what is appropriate in terms of diplomatic representation, whether it's in Afghanistan, whether it's —

QUESTION: Okay. So one of the things – are you saying that one of the things you are doing to show your displeasure with the Taliban is not reopening the embassy?

MR PRICE: What I'm saying is that we are not in a position to reopen the embassy. There are a number of factors that go into that. Safety and security is, of course, one, but also we take a look at the propriety of diplomatic representation around the world.

Our point is that we will judge the Taliban and any future relationship we might one day have with the Taliban based on their conduct, based on their willingness to live up to the public commitments they've made to the world. First and foremost is human rights, protecting the rights of the Afghan people, including its women, its girls, its minorities; living up to its counterterrorism commitments; living up to the fact that no entity should be holding an American hostage. We've discussed, of course, the case of Mark Frerichs. We'll continue to work to secure his freedom. There are a number of elements that go into our – any relationship we might one day have with the Taliban. But I can assure you that human rights is central to that list.

Yes.

QUESTION: Can we move to U.S.-ASEAN Special Summit?

MR PRICE: Sure.

QUESTION: Yeah. So how – on U.S.-ASEAN Special Summit, especially on Myanmar or Burma, how does the United States plan to work with ASEAN to hold the military junta further accountable for the coup and the violence afterwards?

MR PRICE: Well, we support ASEAN's decision to invite nonpolitical representatives from Burma to high-level ASEAN events absent progress on the ASEAN Five-Point Consensus that was put forward. We will follow ASEAN's precedent for the upcoming U.S.-ASEAN Special Summit, and we're going to continue to follow that precedent because the regime has demonstrably failed to make progress on ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus and it continues to escalate its violence, its repression against the people of Burma.

We continue to support in the meantime ASEAN's efforts to press the regime to urgently and to fully implement the Five-Point Consensus and including an immediate and meaningful visit by the ASEAN special envoy and facilitation of his engagement with all stakeholders, including representatives of the pro-democracy movement. Our partnership with ASEAN is central to returning Burma back to the path of democracy. I certainly expect it will be a topic of discussion as ASEAN leaders descend

on Washington, descend on this building later this week, and we reaffirm our commitment to the Burmese people and we will continue to promote a just and meaningful resolution to the crisis in Burma to help return Burma to that democratic path.

QUESTION: Are more U.S. sanctions against the junta on the table?

MR PRICE: We will always look for ways to promote additional accountability for the military coup, for the related violence, for the repression, for the human rights abuses that have followed in the wake of the coup. As you know, we don't preview specific sanctions or specific steps, but we're always looking for ways to hold accountable those responsible.

QUESTION: If I may —

QUESTION: Just speaking of upcoming regional summits to be held in the United States – do you know where I'm going here?

MR PRICE: You could be speaking of the COVID —

QUESTION: No, no, I would be speaking of the Summit of the Americas.

MR PRICE: You could be speaking of Summit of the Americas.

QUESTION: Yeah, yeah. Do you have anything to say about the threats or – or if “threats” is the right word – but suggestions that some countries might not show up because the Cubans, the Nicaraguans, and others are not going to be there?

MR PRICE: I don't have anything to say right now on that. Of course, we will have more to say as the summit gets closer. What – this will be an opportunity for countries throughout the hemisphere to come together to speak to our shared values, the shared interests that unite us. Of course, the White House, as the host of the 9th summit, will determine which countries to invite. The White House has not issued official invites to the summit at this time, but I expect those will go out soon.

QUESTION: Well, when you say “countries throughout the hemisphere,” does that mean all countries, or could some be excluded?

MR PRICE: That is a question that —

QUESTION: Those who do not share your values.

MR PRICE: The invitations are up to the White House, and so we'll have more to say once invitations are extended.

QUESTION: Ned, can I please also ask who will represent Burma on Friday's special summit? I'm asking because United States sent out an event invitation.

MR PRICE: Sorry, you're asking because —

QUESTION: Who will represent Burma in the special summit? Because U.S. sent out an invitation.

MR PRICE: We'll have – and I'm sure you will see more on that in the coming days.

Yes.

QUESTION: Is Secretary attending in person or in —

MR PRICE: He will. He will. That's the plan.

Yes.

QUESTION: Going back to the security assistance for Ukraine, the President, of course, is meeting with the Italian prime minister. There's been concerns expressed in that country, other allies, about the amount of weapons flowing into Ukraine. Does the administration see a limit, especially when it comes to lethal aid?

MR PRICE: We have made clear and the President made clear before the invasion – Secretary Blinken and others have also been speaking to this starting before the invasion but certainly during the invasion – that we would do three things in response to a Russian – renewed Russian invasion against Ukraine. We would provide Ukraine with the security assistance it needs to defend itself, the weapons that it would require to defend Ukrainian freedom, Ukrainian democracy, Ukrainian independence. Second, we would fortify NATO. We would see to it that our Allies, especially our Allies on the eastern flank, had what they needed to deter and potentially even respond to Russian

aggression. And third, we made clear that we would put an unprecedented amount of pressure on the Kremlin through financial sanctions, through export control measures, through tools that we would enact with partners and allies around the world.

We have made good on all three of those steps. We will continue to provide Ukraine with what it needs to defend itself. This is about self-defense. It is about preserving what is important to the Ukrainian people and what is in turn important to us, and that is Ukraine's freedom, its democracy, and its independence.

Yes.

QUESTION: Thank you, sir. Jahanzaib Ali from ARY News TV Pakistan. Secretary Blinken called youngest foreign minister of Pakistan, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, and invited him to attend a food security summit. So what were the points of discussion during the talk? And are we expecting any one-to-one meeting between Secretary Blinken and Bhutto?

MR PRICE: I don't have any bilateral meetings to preview during the – next week's food security gathering in New York. What I can say is that Secretary Blinken did have an opportunity to speak with his new Pakistani counterpart, Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, last week – May 6th, I believe it was. They had an opportunity to reflect on the 75th anniversary of U.S.-Pakistani relations, to talk about how we can strengthen that cooperation going forward. It is a broad-based bilateral relationship. The Secretary underscored the resolute U.S.-Pakistan commitment to Afghan stability and to combating terrorism as well. They also discussed ongoing engagement when it comes to our economic ties, trade and investment, climate, energy, health, and education. So it was a wide-ranging conversation, as these introductory conversations oftentimes are, and I expect before long they will have an opportunity to follow up on that.

QUESTION: Sir, former Prime Minister Imran Khan is still blaming U.S. efforts from – for his ouster from prime minister office and leading an anti-American campaign. So do you think that his anti-American campaign creating fractures among the structure of the diplomatic relation between Pakistan and U.S. or – or it doesn't matter?

MR PRICE: We are not going to let propaganda, misinformation, and disinformation – lies – get in the way of any bilateral relationship we have, including with the bilateral relationship we have with Pakistan, one we value.

QUESTION: ISI's chief is here in Washington, D.C. Is there any meeting with Secretary Blinken or any other State Department officials?

MR PRICE: I would refer you to Pakistani authorities to comment on his schedule. I'm not aware of any meeting with Secretary Blinken.

QUESTION: Thank you.

MR PRICE: Yes.

QUESTION: Thank you, Ned. I have a question about Taiwan. Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson criticized the State Department has changed the explanation on Taiwan, wording related to Taiwan on the website. So could you help us understand the significance of changing of the words? And were there any change on legal status of Taiwan or U.S.-Taiwan Relations Act?

MR PRICE: Well, there's been no change in our policy. All we have done is update a fact sheet, and that's something that we routinely do with our relationships around the world. When it comes to Taiwan, our policy remains guided by the Taiwan Relations Act, the Three Joint Communiques and Six Assurances, as that very fact sheet notes. We regularly do updates on our fact sheets. Our fact sheets reflect, in the case of Taiwan, our rock-solid, unofficial relationship with Taiwan. And we call upon the PRC to behave responsibly and to not manufacture pretenses to increase pressure on Taiwan.

Yes.

QUESTION: Is it oxymoron to say Taiwan is part of China if the United States has to switch diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China in 1979?

MR PRICE: I didn't catch the first part of your question.

QUESTION: Is it oxymoron to say Taiwan is part of China if the United States had to switch diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China in 1979?

MR PRICE: We operate under the auspices of our "one China" policy.

Yes.

QUESTION: So can I just make sure I understand this?

MR PRICE: Sure.

QUESTION: So there is absolutely no change in policy towards Taiwan and China based on – so why – why was it updated? Why did it change the language?

MR PRICE: Matt, you know, as probably better than most —

QUESTION: I do.

MR PRICE: — that we —

QUESTION: I know very well, but you know what? I also know that anything having to do with Taiwan is anathema to – any change, even if it's a comma in a sentence, is going to get Beijing's attention —

MR PRICE: Well —

QUESTION: — and they're going to be unhappy about it. So why now? Why was the decision made to change the fact sheet? And if there's no change, then why change the fact sheet?

MR PRICE: The fact sheet had not been updated in several years. You know that our fact sheets are regularly updated. I think we care most about ensuring that our relationships around the world are reflected accurately in our fact sheets. I don't think we're as concerned as to what other countries might —

QUESTION: Okay. Well, as you —

MR PRICE: — latch onto in an effort to create a pretense.

QUESTION: As you know and as you guys had previewed, the Secretary was supposed to give a speech this week about U.S. China policy. And of course, he had to postpone it because of his COVID diagnosis. Was this fact sheet updated in anticipation, or was it mistakenly updated – the —

MR PRICE: No, it wasn't a mistake. We —

QUESTION: That it was going to be – yeah, but was it going to be updated in conjunction with the speech that he was going to —

MR PRICE: This was not a policy rollout. This – believe me or not, this was really just a technical update to a fact sheet. Our policy has not changed.

QUESTION: Okay, but the language in it has changed, correct?

MR PRICE: The substance has not changed; the policy has not changed.

QUESTION: The language in it has changed, and we all know that language means things, that words mean things, right? So there was – so essentially you're saying there was no reason at all – the previous language could have stood and it would still be viable, still be —

MR PRICE: I invite you – I invite you, rather than just say words have changed, to offer examples of —

QUESTION: Well, I looked at the two side by side.

MR PRICE: — of what might be different. And you will find that our underlying policy has not changed.

QUESTION: Okay.

MR PRICE: The fact sheet makes very clear that our “one China” policy has not changed. It remains guided by the Taiwan Relations Act, the Three Joint Communiques, and the Six Assurances.

Yes.

QUESTION: Ned, on Russia-Ukraine, let me start with the Secretary's statement on cyber activity. Can you tell us more about your findings? Any, let's say, indication to Russia's increased capabilities that would tell other countries, like immediate neighbors, that they are much more vulnerable than they used to be? If you talk to anyone in Georgia, Estonia, they will tell you, “We told you so years ago. You never listened to us.” But what does it tell you about Russia's capabilities right now?

And also, secondly, isn't – I think the Secretary mentions new mechanisms to help Ukraine to detect and also to protect from Russian cyber attacks. Any additional details about that?

MR PRICE: Sure. So on your second question first – and I'll get to today's announcement –but we have worked very closely with our Ukrainian partners in recent years, including in the months preceding Russia's invasion of Ukraine, to bolster their cyber capabilities. And so when we talk about some of the attacks that took place against Ukrainian systems, including these DDoS attacks that took place in the days and weeks prior to Russia's invasion, we've made the point – and our Ukrainian partners, more importantly, have made the point – that their systems were back up, fully running, fully operational, in many cases within hours. And that is a testament to Ukraine's capabilities in the cyber realm. It's a testament to its ability – to its cyber resilience, to its ability to weather such operations. And we have been quite instrumental in helping Ukraine get to that point.

Now, what we said today, and we did this in tandem with allies and partners in Europe and – in Europe, is to publicly share our assessment that Russia launched cyber attacks in late February against commercial satellite communications networks in an effort to disrupt Ukrainian command and control during the invasion, and that those efforts did have spillover effects into other European countries. The activity disabled very-small-aperture terminals, or VSATs, in Ukraine and across Europe. This includes tens of thousands of terminals outside of Ukraine that, among other things, support wind turbines and provide internet services to private citizens, essentially serving as a link between satellites in the sky and systems on the ground.

We and our partners are taking steps to help defend against Russia's irresponsible actions. We've identified new mechanisms to help Ukraine identify cyber threats and recover from cyber incidents, precisely what I was referring to a moment ago. We've also enhanced our support for Ukraine's digital connectivity, including by providing satellite phones and data terminals to Ukrainian Government officials and critical infrastructure operators.

We are – we praise Ukraine's efforts, both in and out of government, to guard against and help their country recover from malicious cyber activity, even as their country is under physical attack. And the way that Ukraine was able to weather and to be resilient against and to bounce back from these malicious cyber attacks, it was a testament of the ability of Ukraine's cyber defenders.

QUESTION: And one more question. Let me press you on the SST, if you don't mind. I think you understand why we are asking about Russia's designation, because another country today

recognized Russia as a terrorist state. How far are we from the SST designation? Is it about days? A month? You mentioned other countries. You mentioned parliamentarian as a process. Are you expecting a message or any appeal from the Hill, or what is the process that we're missing here? Are we missing a fact? Cuba last year was designated. At least is – how close is Russia to that list based on its actions, current actions, in Ukraine?

MR PRICE: Well, whether it's this authority or any other authority, we don't detail our internal deliberations. But what I can tell you is that for every authority that's available to us, we look at the law – in this case it's a law that determines the criteria for designating a state sponsor of terrorism – and we look at the facts. And so we are looking at both. And when it comes to the facts, we are closely looking at what Russia is doing, what Russia has done, to the people of Ukraine to determine which policy tools are most appropriate and responsive to those actions, but again noting that we have already placed enormous economic and financial pressure on Moscow. It is not just the United States that has done this, but it is countries around the world, dozens of countries across four continents, that have done so as well.

But if there is a tool that is appropriate, as defined in this case or any other case by the law, and that would be effective, again, we will not hesitate to use it.

Yes.

QUESTION: Along that release of the information on the cyber attacks, now, what – can you talk about the timing of that? Why was that done now? And also, we know some of those attacks are ongoing. Is there a concern that that spillover effect could be felt, again, in Europe or other places?

MR PRICE: Well, these things do take time. What I can say is that we've worked closely with Ukraine, with NATO, with other European partners and other parties, since well before Russia's invasion to understand the extent and the impact of Russia's malicious cyber activity against Ukraine. And over time, we've sought out ways to meet Ukraine's need for cyber security and connectivity support, and we'll continue to augment that support.

As I said, in the leadup to the invasion, there were a spate of attacks, attacks from which Ukraine was able to bounce back quickly. An element of that was the training, was the support that the United States Government had provided to our Ukrainian partners well before the invasion, knowing that Ukraine has been a target of malicious cyber activity, including from the Russian

Federation, for at least the better part of a decade.

Any time we attribute a cyber activity such as this one, we do so with an eye to protecting sources and methods. We do so with an eye to the implications. But in this case, we're able to attribute it publicly, having gone through a process, having consulted closely with our Ukrainian partners, with our NATO Allies, with other European partners and others.

QUESTION: One more on holding Russia accountable, if you don't mind?

MR PRICE: Let me move around just a little bit. Daphne.

QUESTION: I was going to switch to the Philippines, if that's okay.

MR PRICE: Sure.

QUESTION: How do you expect Marcos's presidency will have an impact on relations with the U.S. and American efforts to curb Chinese influence in the region? And then I have a question on Sudan as well, if that's okay.

MR PRICE: Well, your question jumps ahead just a little bit. We're not quite there. We're monitoring the election results, and we look forward to renewing our special partnership and to working with the next administration on key human rights and regional priorities. As I said, we look forward to working with the president-elect, once that person is officially named, to strengthen the enduring alliance between the United States and the Philippines. It's an enduring alliance that is rooted in a long and deeply interwoven history, shared democratic values and interests, and strong people-to-people ties between our countries as friends, as partners, as allies.

We'll continue to collaborate closely to advance a free and open, connected, prosperous, secure, and resilient Indo-Pacific region. We'll also continue, as I said before, to promote respect for human rights and the rule of law, which is fundamental to U.S. relations with the Philippines and in other bilateral contexts as well. And we're very pleased to welcome Secretary of Foreign Affairs Locsin to Washington this week for the U.S.-ASEAN summit.

QUESTION: And then —

QUESTION: Well, wait. Before you go to Sudan, all signs point to the conclusion that Marcos has won. So do you have any concerns about Bongbong Marcos being the new president of the Philippines?

MR PRICE: What I can say from a technical standpoint is that we understand the casting and counting of votes to have been conducted in line with international standards and without significant incident. Again, the counting is still underway. It is not for us to declare a winner. We'll wait for the Philippines election authorities to do that.

QUESTION: Well, I'm not asking you to declare a winner. I'm just asking you if you have any particular concerns about Marcos's son becoming the next president.

MR PRICE: We —

QUESTION: You certainly had concerns about Duterte.

MR PRICE: We look forward to working with the president-elect on the shared values and the shared interests that have united our countries across generations.

Yes, go ahead.

QUESTION: The State Department released a statement last night supporting the tripartite political process in Sudan, but the UNITAMS talks that were supposed to kick off today did not. Is this something the U.S. is concerned about? And what makes you confident this process, which is facing criticism and suspicion from parties in the country, is the right path? And then is there any progress being made on holding security forces accountable for violence against demonstrators?

MR PRICE: So we did release a statement last night. We released that statement to underscore our view that the UNITAMS-African Union-IGAD process is the best way to facilitate an inclusive path forward on Sudan's transition to democracy. Any deviation from that process would undo months of hard work with grassroots civilian activists and human rights defenders geared towards obtaining a broadly acceptable agreement. We do condemn violence against and unjust detentions of peaceful protesters, and we call for those responsible to be held accountable. We likewise condemn undue restrictions on local and international press in Sudan.

We are prepared to levy consequences on those who impede or otherwise spoil Sudan's transition to democracy. We won't resume currently paused assistance to the Sudanese Government until a credible civilian government is in place. We will, however, continue to support the Sudanese people, including through humanitarian assistance and support for civil society, which has continued uninterrupted since the takeover.

Francesco.

QUESTION: On Sri Lanka, do you have anything new, any update since yesterday, since the situation has further deteriorated and the sight – sight on view order – to shoot sight —

MR PRICE: Well, we're concerned by the deployment of the military. We underscore, we stress that peaceful protesters should never be subject to violence or intimidation, whether that's on the part of a military force or civilian unit.

More broadly, we're deeply concerned by reports of escalating violence in Sri Lanka over the past few days. We condemn, as I said before, violence against peaceful protesters. We call for a full investigation, arrests, and prosecution of anyone instigating and involved in acts of violence. We are, as I said before, also closely monitoring the deployment of troops, something that is of concern to us, and we're also closely following political developments and the situation on the ground in Sri Lanka after the resignation of the prime minister.

We urge the government and political leaders to work quickly to ensure public safety and work together to identify and implement solutions to achieve long-term economic and political stability in Sri Lanka. The government must address the Sri Lankan people's discontent over the economic crisis, including power, food, and medicine shortages, as well as their concerns about the political future of their country.

QUESTION: So in other words, the answer was no, you didn't have anything to add from what you said yesterday, but you decided to go and repeat it.

MR PRICE: He asked about the deployment of military forces.

QUESTION: You talked about that yesterday, though – (laughter) —

MR PRICE: Nazira.

QUESTION: Yes. The other question that – as you know already, (inaudible) war started in Afghanistan as they protect it. And Ahmad Massoud, Ahmad Shah Massoud's son, make a group, and they started some activity. On the other side, some expert – the United States, Australia, Canada – they get together and make a group to fight against the Taliban, and Afghan people sacrificed in this way. Does United States support some of them, either Ahmad Massoud group or some other expert, that they try to do something against Taliban?

MR PRICE: We believe the best way to protect and to promote the human rights of all Afghans, including Afghanistan's women and girls, is through dialogue, inclusive dialogue. So we have continued to press the Taliban to take part in a meaningful, inclusive dialogue representative of all of Afghan society, including minorities, women, and girls.

QUESTION: Sir, one of my colleagues sent me a question, if you would like to respond. Sir, she says that U.S. and Pakistan have always had a good education exchange relationship that opens doors to sharing ideas, best practices, innovation, and much more. Do you foresee continuation of such initiatives and efforts to expand relations with Pakistan and the people of Pakistan?

MR PRICE: I absolutely do. Our educational exchange program, whether it's with Pakistan, whether it's with any other country, it's a core element of our people-to-people ties. We've been fortunate to have Pakistanis studying here in this country. We have American students who've had the opportunity to study in Pakistan. Those types of exchanges are always helpful, are always valuable as we seek to understand our partners and, as Americans, seek to better understand the world, and as we have other countries better understand America.

Nike, last question.

QUESTION: Yes. Can I ask about South Korea? South Korea's new president officially takes office today. Do you have anything on South Korea's offer to North Korea's – to improve North Korea's economy if it ends its nuclear weapons? Thanks.

MR PRICE: Well, let me start by saying that we do congratulate President Yoon Suk-yeol on his inauguration. The United States-ROK alliance, rooted in the close friendship of our people, is the linchpin for peace, security, and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific. We have been and we will continue to

coordinate closely with the ROK to address the threat posed by the DPRK's unlawful WMD programs, its ballistic missile program as well, and to advance our shared objective on the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. This is, in fact, an objective that we share. It's an objective we shared with the last ROK Government. It's an objective we share with this ROK Government, and I know that we look forward to the opportunities ahead – over the phone, in person – including when the President travels to the ROK in just a matter of days to continue these discussions with the new ROK administration on how we can advance and promote that goal.

QUESTION: Does the U.S. also assess North Korea will conduct a nuclear test before – sometime before President Biden's visit to Seoul? I'm asking because it's a assessment by South Korea's intelligence chief.

MR PRICE: I wouldn't want to put a specific timeframe on it, but we have been warning for some time. We have been making public our concern that the DPRK could undertake additional provocations. We have seen three ICBM tests. We've seen additional ballistic missile tests, and we've spoken of our concern that the DPRK may mount another nuclear test in the near term.

Thank you all very much. Thanks.

QUESTION: Thank you.

(The briefing was concluded at 2:50 p.m.)

[Department Press Briefing – May 9, 2022](#)

2:24 p.m. EDT

MR PRICE: Good afternoon, everyone.

QUESTION: Hello.

MR PRICE: Happy Monday. One thing at the top and then I will take your questions. On May 8th and 9th, 1945, celebrations erupted around the world to mark the end of World War II in Europe after Nazi Germany surrendered its military forces to the Allies. It represented the defeat of the forces of authoritarianism, of oppression, and of aggression. We honor the sacrifice of all those who made that victory in 1945 possible. We also join our friends in the European Union celebrating Europe Day today, working to realize the dream of a Europe whole, free, and at peace, which is more urgent today than in any time in recent memory.

Today, President Putin's unprovoked war against Ukraine, its peaceful neighbor, again threatens the stability of Europe, violating the principles that undergird the rules-based international order. His coldblooded aggression has ended too many lives, forced millions of Ukrainian citizens from their homes, and brought suffering to millions more. Just this past weekend, Putin's forces executed an airstrike on a school serving as a bomb shelter, and reports indicate that around 60 civilians are

under the rubble.

On this solemn occasion, we reiterate that the United States stands with Ukraine. We thank our allies, we thank our partners who are providing safe haven to refugees from Ukraine. We applaud the countries that have stood up to the Kremlin's bullying and threats. The United States remembers that victory over tyranny is hard fought and hard won, and we will continue to support Ukraine as it fights for the freedom of its country and its people and the values we together share.

Yesterday, the United States took sweeping actions to hold perpetrators and facilitators of human rights abuses accountable, to impose severe costs on the Government of the Russian Federation, and to degrade the Kremlin's ability to support President Putin's unprovoked and unjustified war against Ukraine.

Specifically, we imposed visa restrictions on over 2,600 Russian and Belarusian military officials who are believed to have been involved in actions that threaten or violate the sovereignty, territorial integrity, or political independence of Ukraine. Including among this group are personnel who reportedly took part in Russian military activities in Bucha, the horrors of which have shocked the world.

We designated the executives and board members of two of Russia's most important banks, a Russian state-owned bank and 10 of its subsidiaries, and a state-supported weapons manufacturer.

Further, we designated the Ministry of Defense's shipping company and six other maritime shipping companies that transport weapons and other military equipment for the Government of Russia, while identifying 69 of their vessels as blocked property. Additionally, we designated a specialized marine engineering company that produces remotely operated subsea equipment, among other activities.

We also designated three state-owned and controlled media outlets that are within Russia and have been among the largest recipients of foreign revenue, which feeds back to the Russian state. These television stations are key sources of disinformation used to bolster President Putin's war.

Finally, the United States is cutting off Russia's access to certain key services from U.S. companies that the Russian Federation and Russian elites exploit to hide their wealth and evade these very sanctions. We are prohibiting U.S. persons, wherever located, from providing accounting, trust and

corporate formation, and management consulting services to any person located in Russia. We are also identifying the accounting, trust and corporate formation services, and management consulting sectors of the Russian economy, which will allow the United States to target any person who operates or has operated in these sectors of the Russian economy.

Our actions yesterday complement previous steps we have taken with our allies and partners since the beginning of Russia's unconscionable war. The United States will continue to execute new economic measures against Russia as long as the Russian Federation continues its aggression against Ukraine.

With that, happy to turn to your questions.

QUESTION: Thanks, Ned. Happy Monday. A couple things on Ukraine, on the sanctions, and then after that I wanted to ask you just if you have any thoughts about President Putin's Victory Day speech today and what you thought about it. But on the sanctions first – and I suspect that your answers will be brief – one, can you be at all more specific about the visa restrictions, about who these 2,600 people are? How many of them are actually accused of or suspected of or have been identified as being suspects in committing war crimes, and how many others are just what you would say, I suppose, just complicit in the whole operation?

And then also on the sanctions, secondly, are you concerned at all that the sanctions that you've imposed on these Russian-owned, state-owned TV stations will open up in particular U.S.-funded – more restrictions, more Russian restrictions on U.S.-funded media outlets?

MR PRICE: Sure. So on your first question, Matt, as you know, we announced a slew of measures yesterday. The visa restrictions on Belarusian and Russian military officials was one element of that. As you alluded to and as I alluded to at the top, we imposed sanctions on three of the most highly viewed state-controlled TV stations. We put measures in place to prevent U.S. persons from providing key services to individuals in the Russian Federation. We announced additional export controls, new controls to further limit Russia's access to items and revenue that could potentially support its military activity. And we sanctioned a large number of individuals, including the – actually more than 2,600 individuals you mentioned.

Specifically, we took action to impose visa restrictions on 2,596 Russian nationals who are members of Russia's armed forces and are believed to have been involved in actions that threatened or

violated Ukraine's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and political – or political independence. A majority of these nationals were reportedly in Bucha during the atrocities that occurred in March – or excuse me, in March of this year. We further targeted 13 Belarusian military officials believed to have been – believed to have supported or been actively complicit in President Putin's war against Ukraine.

When it comes to the sanctioning of these television stations, I think a couple points are in order. First, these are some of the most prolific purveyors of the misinformation and rather the disinformation that President Putin and his government have consistently fed to Russians. These are some of the very outlets that claimed that the atrocities – potential war crimes – that we have all seen in Bucha and other places were staged, that they took place after Russian forces left, that they are the work of Ukraine, of the West. There is no doubt that these are key elements in President Putin's efforts to keep his people in the dark and to actually place a veil of disinformation around their heads.

Importantly, what we did is deprive the ability of U.S. advertisers – any U.S. advertiser that would see fit to advertise with these stations – to do so. And not only are these key sources of misinformation and disinformation for President Putin and the Kremlin, but they are key sources of foreign revenue, about \$300 million a year. That is not a paltry sum, especially when you take into account the fact that we have systematically choked off many of the sources of foreign revenue that President Putin and the broader Kremlin have been able to enjoy.

So we know the Kremlin often takes part in moral equivalence. I am somewhat certain they might seek to do so here. But there is no equivalence between what these stations do and what U.S.-funded outlets do around the world.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MR PRICE: And then on your question in terms of President Putin's speech today, look, rather than respond directly to something that is so ahistorical, something that is so divorced from reality, it's an opportunity for us to be clear about the facts and the reality. Contrary to what we heard today in Moscow, Russia's invasion of Ukraine is a brutal war of choice. It was unprovoked, it was unjustified, it was premeditated, and it has brought catastrophic loss of life across Ukraine – Ukrainians and, yes, Russian service members who – many of whom were sent to Ukraine without prior knowledge to fight and die for a war that many of them may have wanted no part in.

We know that in the conduct of this war Russia's forces have committed war crimes and carried out atrocities. Just this weekend we saw a school in eastern Ukraine leveled by a Russian bomb. I mentioned at the top there are reports that dozens of individuals may still be under the rubble. To call this a defensive action is patently absurd. To call this anything other than a premeditated war of choice against the state of Ukraine, the Government of Ukraine, the people of Ukraine is an affront to the historical record.

One other point on this – and many of you are deeply familiar with this because many of you were with us during these efforts – but Secretary Blinken, others in the administration spared no diplomatic effort to prevent, to forestall this war. These efforts started last year, late last year, when we first went public with our concerns about what was then Russia's military buildup along the borders with Ukraine inside Belarus. We tried to do so bilaterally, engaging directly with Foreign Minister Lavrov, engaging directly with his deputies in the context of the Strategic Stability Dialogue that Deputy Secretary Sherman led. We tried to do so multilaterally at the NATO-Russia Council together with our NATO Allies. We tried to do so multilaterally through the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe with a broader set of allies and partners.

Of course, none of those efforts worked. It was not for lack of trying. It was not for lack of good faith effort. It was because this was a premeditated and wholly unjustified war – there's no other term for it, no other euphemism for it, even if you're not allowed to say it in Russia – that was premeditated and predetermined from the start.

So to hear senior Russian officials claim otherwise again is a disservice to history. It is an insult to those who have lost their lives and those who have fallen victim to this senseless aggression.

QUESTION: Okay. So on the visa bans, where do these names come from? And how do you know that the majority of the 2,596 Russian troops were reportedly in Bucha? Are these coming from the – are the names coming from the Ukrainians, or do you have your own, like, list of Russian soldiers who've been deployed to Ukraine?

MR PRICE: So there's not too much I can say here. What I can say is that we pull from all sources of information that are available to us. In some cases, this will be public information. As you might imagine, in many cases, especially in instances like this, this information won't be public. It will be from our own sources of information. We do coordinate closely with our Ukrainian partners. But I will tell you that we do an immense amount of vetting on any information we receive to ensure that

when we apply a statutory authority against any individual, against any entity or target, that that individual entity or target does, in fact, meet the statutory requirements of the law.

QUESTION: You have no idea if any of these people actually have even Russian passports for which they could get a – might be able to get a visa.

MR PRICE: Well, there are some 2,500 Russians and 13 Belarussians —

QUESTION: All right. Well, but do – how many of them actually had visas or even had passports who were –

MR PRICE: You probably won't be surprised to hear me say that visa records are confidential. So I just –

QUESTION: Well, I'm not surprised to hear you say that. But on the TV thing —

MR PRICE: Yes.

QUESTION: Were you aware of any U.S. advertisers that were actually buying time on these channels? By that, I'm trying to get at what – if you say you're denying them this opportunity, this revenue opportunity, how – what's the hit here? How much are they going to lose in U.S. advertising?

MR PRICE: I couldn't tell you if any U.S. advertisers had been purchasing time recently. But what I can tell you is that there were hundreds of millions of dollars in revenue that these stations were pulling in. It's not only U.S. advertisers who are now not able to do this, but it sends an important signal to foreign companies around the world that might otherwise consider advertising in what not all that long ago was a lucrative marketplace, could have been a lucrative marketplace.

QUESTION: Okay. But you don't have any idea what the hit that they're going to take is, do you?

MR PRICE: I don't have an assessment to offer for you right here.

QUESTION: All right.

MR PRICE: Humeyra.

QUESTION: Ned, staying on Ukraine, I think it was last week the U.S. ambassador to OSCE said he was – the U.S. was assessing that Russia was planning to annex Donetsk, Luhansk, hold the sham referendums there. There has been a lot of speculation on what Putin may or may not say today. Some of that hasn't materialized. Given that, is the U.S. still worried about this potential annexation? You guys, I think, had uttered the timeline of mid-May. Is that still the anticipation? Is that still the expectation from the U.S., that that's going to happen around then?

MR PRICE: Our concern remains, and our concern is based on a couple different elements. First, it is based on the Russian playbook. It is a Russian playbook that we have seen, that we have seen turned to time and again. In Crimea, in eastern Ukraine, this is what Russian authorities and proto-authorities have done in the past. They have sought to annex. They have sought to conduct sham elections to give their occupation this patina of legitimacy. And our concern remains that they will attempt to do so once again in territory in eastern Ukraine.

QUESTION: And timeline-wise?

MR PRICE: Timeline-wise, nothing has changed. We're continuing to watch very closely.

What we wanted to do, and part of the reason why we wanted to have Ambassador Carpenter here last week to speak to all of you, was to put our concerns on the record. And this is similar to what we did across the board starting late last year and well into early this year, to put our concerns on the record so that if, and we think when, we see these sham elections in places like Kherson, that the world is keyed in, clued in, to what is happening; that fewer people are fooled by what Russia and its authorities are attempting to do; and that – so we can approach this eyes wide open.

Go ahead.

QUESTION: Right. Just on the U.S. diplomats going back to Kyiv, so we – I mean, this is temporary. Can you sort of say, like, what's the latest U.S. assessment on the security situation there? And based on that, there was a previous projection that, again, like, the embassy's operations might be resumed there for good around mid-May, if I'm not mistaken. Is that still the projection based on the security situation?

MR PRICE: Well, we haven't ever put a precise time frame on it. What we've said is that we will do it as soon as possible. And when Secretary Blinken was in Kyiv late last month with President

Zelenskyy, he pledged to President Zelenskyy that our diplomats would be back in Kyiv as soon as possible, that our embassy would reopen as soon as possible.

And so of course, yesterday on Victory in Europe Day, Ambassador Kvien and a small contingent traveled back into Kyiv. This was something that we had been planning for some time under the direction of Secretary Blinken in close consultation with the White House, with the Department of Defense, and others.

You are right that this is a temporary visit. It does not signal the reopening of our embassy at this time. But we have, and what the Secretary told President Zelenskyy when he saw him in Kyiv, was that we have accelerated planning to reopen our embassy. Of course, a foremost concern for us is the safety and security of our diplomats, of our personnel on the ground. We were confident that the chargé and a small team of hers would be in a position to make the trip yesterday. The chargé is still in Kyiv. She remains there.

This visit, yes, was heavy on symbolism, coming on Victory in Europe Day, but it is also heavy on substance. And I say that because the chargé and her team will be able to meet and have been able to meet with Ukrainian counterparts, with members of civil society, with other representatives of the international community, and conduct a whole host of activities that until yesterday they have not been able to conduct in Kyiv since prior to the invasion.

So we are still assessing the security situation. As soon as we are confident in our ability to fully resume operations at our embassy, we'll do that.

QUESTION: Just for the record, it was actually end of May. I guess you guys are still targeting for that?

MR PRICE: We never – we said in weeks' time. We never offered a —

QUESTION: So it's the chargé for the meantime.

MR PRICE: Yes. Francesco.

QUESTION: Following up on today's speech in Moscow, I heard what you said about the patent absurdity. But what do you make of all the speculations of the fact that he would declare war and

mobilize more formally the Russians, and that didn't happen? What's your comment for that?

MR PRICE: I can't speculate as to the speculation and why such speculation may or may not have come to fruition. I think what I offered here the other day is that a declaration of war, a mass mobilization, may well have been tantamount to admitting what the world knows, and that is that the Ukrainians have achieved great strides and that they have been able to stand up to an aggressing force, to hold out.

And we are now more than 10 weeks into this conflict, a conflict that Russian officials, Russian leaders, thought would culminate in a matter of hours or a matter of days with Russia de facto in charge of Ukraine. Of course, that has not happened, and it hasn't happened because of the tenacity, the grit, the determination, the bravery, the courage of our Ukrainian partners and the enabling assets that the United States and our partners around the world – dozens of partners across four continents – have provided to our Ukrainian partners, \$3.8 billion since the start of the invasion alone from the United States alone. Other partners have provided other sums of security assistance.

But two other points on what we heard today in Moscow. Much of it was quite ironic. The first irony is that this was a day to commemorate the victory of – the victory against the forces of authoritarianism, of oppression, of aggression. That's what happened 77 years ago when the international community – including, might I add, Russia – came today to stop the Nazi advance. And today, the Russians have attempted to co-opt that cause, to celebrate some of these very features that the world sought to vanquish nearly eight decades ago.

I suppose the other great irony is that Moscow is celebrating Victory Day. They're celebrating a victory, and it is in the midst of a victory, but it is in the midst of a Ukrainian victory, and this gets back to what I was saying before. What the Ukrainians have been able to achieve, principally with their own determination and tenacity but also enabled by what the United States and our partners around the world have provided, is nothing short of remarkable.

I think there are few people who might have thought that we would see today, more than 10 weeks after the start of this invasion, a capital city that is coming back to life, whose cafes are filled, whose boulevards are once again filled with people, with the same happening in other parts of the country.

Now, that of course doesn't elide the fact that parts of Ukraine – eastern and southern Ukraine

specifically – have been mercilessly targeted and continue to be targeted by Russian bombs, Russian missiles. And so that's why our effort to support our Ukrainian partners is far from finished. We have put forward a supplemental budget request of \$33 billion, much of that for security assistance for the next five months, to enable our Ukrainian partners to continue to achieve this kind of success on the battlefield, but ultimately to have a stronger hand at the negotiating table.

What we are doing principally is putting our Ukrainian partners in a position for them to carry out their aims, their – ultimately, their political objectives. We're strengthening their hand on the battlefield with our security assistance. At the same time we are imposing increasing pressure on the Russian Federation, combining these two things so that our Ukrainian partners can be in the most advantageous position possible as they engage to try to end this war.

Said.

QUESTION: Ned, a couple of points that you mentioned. First of all, you have any comment on what apparently Pope Francis said, that NATO and the West were actually barking at Russia this whole time, in essence saying that maybe the Russians had a reason to do what they did? If you had any comment on that, if you saw his comment.

MR PRICE: I did, and I've seen subsequent comments from the Vatican on this same matter.

QUESTION: Okay.

MR PRICE: I've also seen Pope Francis's very clear condemnation of the aggression that is taking place in Ukraine, of the loss of life, the bloodshed, the brutality that is taking place.

QUESTION: Okay. Now, the other thing is also the president of France, French President Macron, said that you cannot expect that the Russians will negotiate or achieve peace by continuing to humiliate Russia. So he talked about negotiations. He wanted to strengthen the Ukrainian hand in the negotiations, but it seems that they're – or at least none of the rhetoric that is coming out from you guys, from the – your Western allies or NATO, that shows any flexibility. For instance, you talked about diplomatic efforts prior to the invasion that went on for a long time, yet you totally dismissed Russia's security demands or whatever that they expressed, the Russians' concerns.

MR PRICE: Said, I don't think we totally dismissed anything. And in fact, we, as I said at the top,

engaged in good faith. We believe that there was a path before us that, if the Russians were acting in good faith, could have addressed some of their stated security concerns, but also could have addressed our concerns. And we put forward a pathway that was paved with certain measures – transparency measures, confidence-building measures, nonproliferation measures – that would have done just that.

To say that we didn't account for Russia's security concerns – I'm sorry, but I think that is taking the bait that Moscow has put forward.

QUESTION: Now, one last thing on the diplomatic thing. Ambassador Antonov, I believe, said that he has not met with any American officials for the past two or three months and so on, and conversely. Can you also share with us what is Ambassador Sullivan doing in Moscow and so on?

MR PRICE: Ambassador —

QUESTION: Are there any – yeah.

MR PRICE: Ambassador Sullivan and his team at the embassy in Moscow are continuing to engage with their MFA counterparts. Of course, those engagements are largely limited to the bilateral relationship. There is a lot that Ambassador Sullivan and his team have on their plate, attempting to keep afloat a mission that has been severely constrained in terms of personnel, in terms of our ability to sustain an embassy community there, given some of the restrictions that the Russian Federation has placed on us. So they are continuing to engage with their MFA counterparts.

QUESTION: What about the Russian ambassador here?

MR PRICE: You would need to speak to him about his engagements.

Yes.

QUESTION: Thank you. Thank you, Ned. North Korea fired —

QUESTION: Can I ask – sorry – on Russia?

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MR PRICE: Sure. We'll say maybe on or two questions on Russia. Go ahead, Jenny.

QUESTION: Has there been any update on the Americans detained there?

MR PRICE: I don't have any update I can offer you right now. As you know, last week we made a variety of announcements. We made clear that we consider Brittney Griner to be wrongfully detained. We are working very closely on her case; we're working very closely on the case of Paul Whelan. Our message across the board for Americans who are detained in Russia is that we expect, consistent with the Vienna Convention, to have regular and consistent access to Americans who are detained, including those Americans who are in pretrial detention. So that is a message that – to Said's question about what we're doing with our Russian counterparts, that is certainly one message that we are pressing regularly with them, that we expect and insist upon this regular access.

QUESTION: Roughly how many are in pretrial detention right now?

MR PRICE: Everywhere around the world, it's a number that fluctuates, and especially in a place where there is a somewhat sizable – although smaller – American citizen community, the number fluctuates, so I'm just not in a position to offer a static one.

Cindy.

QUESTION: Yes. French President Macron is in Berlin this evening for dinner with the German chancellor. And of course, one item is going to be Macron's push for European integration, perhaps more independence from the U.S. also on defense matters. How does the U.S. view this in light of the united front supporting Ukraine?

MR PRICE: We see a strong Europe as absolutely a good thing. We see a strong Europe as essential to transatlantic security and to the transatlantic partnership. Our point has always been that the capabilities that we have should be complementary to what Europe has and what Europe develops. So a strong Europe that is complementary to the United States, that works in close partnership with United States, that is a realization of the framework, of the idea that was put forward some 72 years ago, I suppose it was, by one of the architects of the European Union.

Yes.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MR PRICE: Anything else on Russia/Ukraine before we move on?

QUESTION: North Korea.

MR PRICE: Russia/Ukraine?

QUESTION: Yeah – no, no.

MR PRICE: Okay – no. Okay. We'll one – two more on Russia. Yeah.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) sanctions. You mentioned some 2,600 soldiers. What about their family members? We have some instances such as a young wife greenlighting her husband's – soldier husband's actions in Ukraine. Are you planning to extend to family members as well?

And also, any plan to extend the ban on professional services to legal services, which – I've heard from the Congress for many years that you should go after lawyers who have been enabling Russian kleptocracy, engaging money laundering in the U.S.

MR PRICE: We have not yet opted to go after legal services. We believe that those offering due process here, that those are not yet on the table in terms of our sanctions, but again, we're not going to rule anything in or out in terms of subsequent sanctions tranches.

When it comes to the family members of service members, it is true that we have pursued with our various sanctions authorities close family members, close associates of senior Kremlin leadership, knowing that in many cases these are individuals who share an ill-begotten wealth, who in some way enable the crimes, the injustices that their relatives or associates have put forward. I'm not aware that we've done that in the case of rank-and-file service members. I think the point is, in many cases, individuals have been sent to the front lines not initially knowing where they were going, why they were fighting, or what the intended objective was. So with our sanctions, we want to ensure that those we pursue have some sort of strategic value, some sort of strategic import.

QUESTION: Yes, and on disinformation, it looks Russians have been expanding their lies about bio labs to other countries, such as Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, something

(inaudible) felt over the weekend that they had to respond to. I don't want to dignify what they are talking about in this room, but I want to give you a chance to respond to the fact that they are expanding the geography by – with the talk about so-called bio labs. Thank you.

MR PRICE: Again, I don't want to dignify those lies either. We know they're lies. We've been very clear about where we stand in terms of the Chemical Weapons Convention, where countries like – and the Biological Weapons Convention – where Ukraine stands in terms of the CWC and the BWC, where other countries stand. And that is in contrast to where Russia stands.

Yes.

QUESTION: On those Victory Day celebrations, we did see thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of Russians march in support of Vladimir Putin's military campaign. Do you see this as a sign that the war is gaining widespread support in Russia? And if yes, how do you combat that?

MR PRICE: We see it as a sign that the Russian population is being fed a steady diet of disinformation and lies. This is one of the reasons why we went after the television stations we did with our sanctions today. President Putin and the mouthpieces of the Kremlin have been providing their people with lies, with disinformation, with misinformation, in order to sell them a war that, I think if many of them knew the truth, they would reject out of hand. It is difficult to measure – to accurately measure – popular opinion within Russia. Of course, what we can point to is the fact that at the very outset of this unjustified war, thousands upon thousands of Russians took to the street to protest it. Those protests were obviously met with a crackdown, in some cases a violent crackdown, in many cases – in up to 15,000 cases, if I recall – the imprisonment, the detention of individuals who were doing nothing more than exercising what should be the universal right to freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, and doing so peacefully.

So the phenomenon you point to may also be a reflection of the fact that President Putin has attempted to intimidate, has attempted to stifle any and all dissent, but we know that dissent exists. Many of your networks have personnel on the ground in Russia. They know that when they attempt to ask Russians their true thoughts of President Putin, the Kremlin, many of them walk away, oftentimes in fright. I think that says a lot.

Okay, we'll move on.

QUESTION: Yeah, thank you, Ned. I – talking about North Korea fired missiles. North Korea fired a ICBM on the 7th. The South Korean Government reported that the North Korea launch was a SRBM, submarine-launch ballistic missiles. Does the United States agree with this, or is there any other analyst in the United States?

MR PRICE: Is there any other —

QUESTION: Any other analyst.

MR PRICE: Analysis – our analysis is that this was a – the launch of a ballistic missile. Our analysis is that, like previous launches, including the three previous tests of the ICBM systems, that this was a clear violation of multiple UN Security Council resolutions. That's why we're discussing this, as we are previous provocations, previous launches, with our allies in the Republic of Korea, in Japan, and also in New York.

QUESTION: Last time, you said that North Korea's ICBM was an affront to the United Nations Security Council resolutions, but the UN Security Council resolution has not properly adopted the resolutions. Do you think the United Nations Security Council is fulfill its role, or you need another alternative roles —

MR PRICE: The UN Security Council has an important role to play. It has an important role to play that it's exercised in the past, and this gets back to the point I mentioned just a moment ago. The most recent ballistic missile launch, the three previous ICBM launches, the other ballistic missile launches in recent months – these have been in violation of multiple security council resolutions. The fact that these resolutions are on the books points to the utility that the Security Council, that the UN system can have in confronting North Korea's ballistic missile and nuclear weapons program.

It's incumbent upon all countries – certainly including the permanent five members of the UN Security Council – to see to it that UN Security Council resolutions are fully implemented, fully applied, because countries around the world, including the five members of the permanent security – five permanent Security Council members, those members that voted in support of these and other resolutions, have recognized the fact that the DPRK's ballistic missile and nuclear weapons programs are a threat to international peace and security. And, of course, the Security Council is the world's preeminent forum – it was set up to be that – to address all threats to peace and security.

This is one of them, and we'll continue to work on this issue with our allies and partners in New York.

Yes.

QUESTION: Thank you, Mr. Price. As you know, Taliban didn't keep their commitment, and recently they ordered all women in Afghanistan to wear burqa hijab – not regular hijab, burqa like that. Yesterday Afghan women celebrated Mother's Day with the crying. Everybody contact with me cry, I cried, all women in Afghanistan. Do you think it's not very backwards? That's crazy.

MR PRICE: We have expressed our deep dismay, we have expressed our deep concern with what we have seen from the Taliban, with what we have heard from the Taliban in recent days and in recent weeks. Over the weekend most recently, our Special Representative for Afghanistan Tom West; our Special Envoy for Afghan Women, Girls, and Human Rights Rina Amiri; Ian McCary, our chargé – our Embassy Kabul chargé who's now based in Doha – issued statements to this effect.

And we have noted that the Taliban continue to adopt policies oppressing women and girls, in many ways as a substitute for addressing the acute economic crisis and the need for inclusive government. And we have called for an end to these restrictive measures. Importantly, Afghans across the country have voiced their opposition to an edict that proposes severe restrictions and limitations on half the country's ability to participate in society. This follows, of course, on the heels of the decision with girls' secondary education. No country can succeed that holds back half of its population – its women, its girls – that doesn't allow them to go to secondary school, that dictates what they must wear in a restrictive way. Combined with the ban on secondary education, restrictions on freedom of movement and these edicts related to clothing, the Taliban's policies towards women we think are an affront to human rights and will continue to impair their relations with the international community.

QUESTION: So, Ned, what happened to the assessment that – or at least the hope that the Taliban wouldn't do anything that – or would – understood that if it wanted to be internationally recognized, that if it wanted all the benefits that come with such recognition, they wouldn't impose the kind of draconian rules and regulations that they did the first time they were in power? I mean, I remember conversations with you in this very room pre-withdrawal about why did you – why did you think that they had changed at all? Why did you think that – they didn't care what the world thought the first time around they were in charge; why would you possibly think that they would care the second?

MR PRICE: Matt, our point has always been – well, let me start by saying our point was never that the Taliban is fundamentally different from the Taliban that existed in years prior. Our contention was always that the United States, when – especially when we're acting with partners around the world, we have sources of leverage to wield with the Taliban. In response to the decision on secondary school, in response to this most recent decree, in response to some of the other human rights abuses and atrocities that we've seen in Afghanistan, we are working with our allies and partners to use that leverage.

QUESTION: Well, what have you done? I mean, the school – the secondary school decision is old now. I mean, it's not new, but there's been nothing done in response to it. What are you going to do now?

MR PRICE: We have consulted closely with our allies and partners. There are steps that we will continue to take to increase pressure on the Taliban to reverse some of these decisions, to make good on the promises that they have made, first and foremost to their own people, not to mention to the international community.

QUESTION: Well, what are those steps? I mean, other than you coming out and saying we deeply deplore this and we don't think it's – you don't think it's – I mean, they don't care if you – if you insult them or if you criticize them. They just – it doesn't matter to them. So what —

MR PRICE: Leaving aside whether or not they care, there are sources of leverage, including —

QUESTION: Well, what are they, and why you haven't you been —

MR PRICE: — including incentives and disincentives —

QUESTION: Okay, but why haven't they been used now that they've done – taken these two very dramatic steps as it relates to women and girls?

MR PRICE: Matt, we are working on this closely with our allies and partners. We've addressed it directly with the Taliban. We have a number of tools that, if we feel these won't be reversed, these won't be undone, that we are prepared to move forward with.

In the meantime, the United States continues to be the world's largest humanitarian provider to the

Afghan people. We have provided hundreds of millions of dollars worth of humanitarian support, including an additional installment of humanitarian support recently. We've spoken, of course, of the reserves, half of which will be available to the people of Afghanistan. We'll continue, even in the midst of the setbacks on the part of the Taliban, to do all we can – which is in some ways quite a lot – to support directly the Afghan people in a way that doesn't benefit the Taliban.

Yes, sir.

QUESTION: Thank you, Ned. This is Mushfiqul Fazal. I'm representing HAS News Media. I have two question, one on Sri Lanka and one on Bangladesh. Sri Lankan Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa has resigned. A mass protest, five people have died and more than 190 injured in violent in the capital. The island nation is facing its worst economic crisis since its independence. So what is your comment on this one?

MR PRICE: Well, we're closely following the ongoing developments in Sri Lanka, including the resignation of the prime minister. We urge the government to work quickly to identify and implement solutions to achieve long-term economic stability and address the Sri Lankan people's discontent over the worsening economic conditions, including power, food, and medicine shortages as well. We condemn violence against peaceful protesters, and call for a full investigation, arrests and prosecutions of anyone involved. We are also concerned with the state of emergency declarations which can be used to curb dissent. So we're continuing to watch this very closely.

Yes, sir.

QUESTION: One more on Bangladesh.

MR PRICE: Okay.

QUESTION: As you know, Bangladesh is struggling for democracy, voting rights, and freedom of expression. The Digital Security Act is on our shoulder. And the – our country's reputed economist and Nobel Laureate Professor Yunus facing false charges. And former prime minister and main opposition leader still is in jail. Your recent State Department report mentioned that it's a political ploy to remove her from the electoral process.

So will you urge or you will call for her immediate release, as everybody knows it's a political ploy for

—

MR PRICE: I'm not in a position to speak to this specific case, but what I can say is that we continue to engage with our partners in Bangladesh. A senior State Department official recently took part in bilateral engagements in Bangladesh. We value our partnership with the people, with the Government of Bangladesh. Issues of human rights, issues of civil liberties, those are always on the agenda when we engage around the world.

Yes.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) from South Korea. The inauguration of South Korea's new president, Yoon Suk Yeol, will be held today. So what do you think about it and do you have any comment on this?

MR PRICE: Well, there is an enduring quality to our alliance with the Republic of Korea, and it's enduring in the sense that it is an alliance that is built on shared interests and shared values. It is not predicated on who's in office at any given time, whether that's here in the United States, whether that is in the Republic of Korea.

So we are very confident – and we know this because we have had a chance to already meet with some of the transition officials, some of the incoming government officials – that our alliance with the ROK will endure, and that together we'll be able to pursue our interests and to protect our values.

Yes. Let me move around a little bit just to – yes, Michel.

QUESTION: Ned, in his talks with his counterparts in Israel, Greece, and Cyprus, did the Secretary discuss the possibility of reviving the gas pipeline from Israel to Europe?

MR PRICE: We will – we – in fact, we did have a joint statement regarding the so-called 3+1 talks between the Secretary and his Israeli, Greek, and Cypriot counterparts. There was a discussion of energy security. It was a broader opportunity to recommit to promoting peace, stability, and prosperity in the Eastern Mediterranean. This is a format in which the – those involved decided to intensify their efforts on a number of fronts, including, as I said before, in the energy – in the areas of energy security, economy, climate action, emergency preparedness, counterterrorism, which, in turn, contributes to resilience, energy security, and interconnected – interconnectivity in the region.

I wouldn't want to go beyond what's in the readout in terms of specific issues discussed, but we may have a little bit more for you today.

QUESTION: And one more on the conference on Syria in Brussels: What was the main message that the U.S. wanted to send, and did the U.S. make any pledge?

MR PRICE: Well, Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield is representing us in Brussels. This conference is May 9th and 10th. It is hosted by the EU. I think the message that you will hear from the ambassador is one to underscore our commitment and our determination to work in partnership with the international community to support the Syrian people.

On the margins of the Brussels conference, she'll host a ministerial meeting to discuss the future of international support for the Syrian political process and the importance of accountability for human rights violations abuses and violations of the Law of Armed Conflict. She also, while in Brussels, will meet with NATO and EU officials to discuss Russia's war in Ukraine, but I suspect you'll hear more shortly on that.

Yes.

QUESTION: Excuse me, Ned. G7 foreign ministerial meeting will be held in Germany this week. So what deliverables do you expect from the meeting and who will participate in the meeting of – on the behalf of the United States?

MR PRICE: Sorry, which meeting specifically were you referring you?

QUESTION: Who will participate in the meeting on behalf of the United States?

MR PRICE: NATO or G7? I didn't hear you.

QUESTION: G7.

MR PRICE: G7. So Ambassador Toria Nuland, our Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, will be representing the United States. Of course, Secretary Blinken was very much looking forward to attending the meeting in Wangels. He will be in a position to attend the meeting that we expect that was scheduled in Berlin. All of this is permitting what we expect will be continued progression,

positive progression. Maybe that's the wrong term in his case. But we'll have more for you on the schedule, but Ambassador Nuland will be representing us at the counter-ISIS coalition and the meeting in Wangel.

Yes, Said.

QUESTION: Very quickly on the Palestinian-Israeli issue. Ned, the Israeli supreme court ruled, okayed actually, gave the green light, to the removal of about 1,300 Palestinians from Masafer Yatta, and statements have been issued by the United Nations and so on calling this forcible removal and so on. Do you have a comment on this? Are you urging the Israelis not to do so?

MR PRICE: Well, we're aware of and we're watching this case very closely. We believe it is critical for all sides to refrain from steps that exacerbate tensions and that undercut efforts to advance a negotiated two-state solution. This certainly includes evictions.

QUESTION: And on Friday, Jalina issued a very strong statement on the settlements and so on. And my question that was raised by one of the journalists, just to repeat what he asked, what's next? I mean, you issue a strong statement. The Israelis are not deterred. I mean, you talk about not listening to you. They're not listening to you. What steps are you willing to take to give your strong statement, your strong objection, to give it some sort of leverage?

MR PRICE: Said, I can tell you that when we make strong statements in public, those are matched by principled engagement diplomatically. We are continuing to discuss a range of issues, including our concerns with our Israeli partners. But as you know, we don't detail those diplomatic conversations.

Francesco.

QUESTION: On Iran. As the EU coordinator is heading back to Tehran this week, is he – will he be carrying any kind of new message, new offer from the U.S. to – on the sticking points? And what are your expectations from the Iranians out of this meeting?

MR PRICE: What I'll say generally in terms of process is that we are in close touch with Enrique Mora, the EU coordinator. He has continued to convey messages back and forth. We support his efforts to bring these negotiations to a successful conclusion. I wouldn't want to prejudge or

attempt to discern what he might hear from his Iranian counterparts. Of course, we'll learn more after his trip.

QUESTION: What are your expectations?

MR PRICE: Our hope is that we can conclude this negotiation quickly. And we are confident that we can conclude this negotiation quickly if the Iranians are willing to proceed in good faith to allow us to continue to build on and to move forward with the significant progress that had been made over months and months of oftentimes painstaking diplomacy and negotiations. But we'll have to see how those conversations go.

QUESTION: And are you offering a new message from the U.S.?

MR PRICE: Obviously, we're not going to negotiate in public. We coordinate very closely with our EU – with our European allies, and in turn Enrique Mora is conveying messages back and forth.

QUESTION: If this effort doesn't work, will you – will you admit that it's off, that it didn't work out? We've been in this holding pattern for weeks.

MR PRICE: The – we will pursue a mutual return to compliance with the JCPOA as long as it's in our national security interest to do so. Right now, it remains in our national security interest to see Iran's nuclear program put back in a box, to see the verifiable, permanent limits once again imposed on Iran. If we get to a point where the nonproliferation benefits that the JCPOA would bring forth have been obviated by the advancements in Iran's nuclear program since 2018, then we'll reassess. We're already at the point where we're preparing equally for either scenario – a mutual return to compliance with the JCPOA or an alternative – and we're discussing both with our allies and partners.

Final couple quick questions. Yes.

QUESTION: Two questions. One is on Armenia. Can I get your reaction to ongoing protests in Armenia – it has been two weeks already – and its implications for the country and the region?

And secondly, in Azerbaijan a high-profile journalist, Aytan Mammadova, got – she covers high-profile trials, and she got attacked today. And this comes just days after we celebrated International

Press Freedom Day. I was looking for your comment on the overall – the press freedom situation as a journalist with this latest incident. Thank you.

MR PRICE: In terms of protests in Armenia – and as you know, we had a Strategic Dialogue with the Armenians last week, I suppose it was – and it was in that forum that we reaffirmed our mutual commitment to Armenia's democratic development and the United States support for lasting peace in the South Caucasus.

We believe that peaceful protests are an element of an open political system. We fully support the fundamental freedoms of expression and peaceful assembly. We urge people to express their opinions in a peaceful manner. We urge authorities to exercise restraint and encourage those protesting to refrain from violence and to respect the rule of law and Armenia's democracy.

When it comes to the specifics of the reporter in Azerbaijan, I'm not immediately familiar with that. If we have a specific comment, we can provide that to you. But as you heard from the Secretary a week ago today, I believe it was, on World Press Freedom Day, you heard our commitment to upholding anywhere and everywhere the freedom of – freedom of the press and freedom of expression that is a right that is universal and that, by definition, is applicable to people everywhere.

We know that reporters around the world oftentimes conduct their work at great peril. Sometimes it's in conflict zones. Sometimes it's in – within political systems that are repressive, insecure, and therefore afraid of the truth. Whenever that happens, we stand with those who are doing nothing more than attempting to shine a light on injustice, to promote accountability, and to improve the lives of their fellow citizens or citizens around the world.

Yes.

QUESTION: On the Bahamas Sandals investigation, given there's still not a clear cause of death for those three Americans – the resort remains open – what's the State Department's level of concern for the Americans who are still staying there? And what if anything from the U.S. side is being done to investigate?

MR PRICE: Well, we can confirm the death of three U.S. citizens in the Bahamas on May 6th. We offer our heartfelt condolences to the families, the other loved ones, for those who have passed. We are closely monitoring local authorities' investigations into the cause of death, and we stand

ready to provide all appropriate consular assistance. Out of respect for the privacy of the families, we just don't have anything to add at this time. If, I should say as a general matter, we do feel that there is a piece of information that the broader American citizen community in any country should know, we of course do relay that via the appropriate consular channels.

QUESTION: But there has not been any such —

MR PRICE: There has not been.

QUESTION: In this case.

MR PRICE: There has not been in this case.

Thank you all very much.

QUESTION: Thank you.

(The briefing was concluded at 3:19 p.m.)

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Powerful to hear the stories, struggles, and sacrifices made by the group of human rights defenders from Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela I met at the [#SummitAmericas](#) today. We stand with [@Yotuel007](#), [@AnamelyRamos](#), Fidel de Jesús and all those defending human rights. 

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